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**AIKIDŌ AND SPIRITUALITY:
JAPANESE RELIGIOUS
INFLUENCES IN A MARTIAL
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A thesis submitted for the degree

of

Master of Arts in

East Asian Studies

in the

Department of East Asian Studies

University of Durham

Margaret Greenhalgh

December 2003



25 AUG 2004

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AIKIDŌ AND SPIRITUALITY:
JAPANESE RELIGIOUS
INFLUENCES IN A MARTIAL ART

Submitted by Margaret Greenhalgh
for the degree of Master of Arts in East Asian Studies

Abstract

This thesis examines spirituality in the Japanese martial art *aikidō*, which was created in the 1940s in Japan by Ueshiba Morihei. He described *aikidō* entirely in spiritual terms and claimed that it is an art of peace which leads religion to completion.

The study has two aims: first, to show how spirituality, defined as ultimate concern and action directed towards it, is possible in the context of a martial art; second, to gain an overview of the original teaching of Ueshiba Morihei which has been fragmented and often misunderstood since his death.

After considering some conceptual hindrances to appreciation of spirituality in the martial arts, the main themes of Japanese spirituality are identified in order to provide context for spirituality in *aikidō*. An analysis of Ueshiba's life and the evolution of *aikidō* is then given. Spirituality in this martial art is then evaluated by comparing the *aikidō* world view and method of practice with those of four religious belief systems influential in Japan: Daoism, Zen Buddhism, Shingon *Mikkyō* and Shintō.

The research entailed reading and analysing primary and secondary documents concerning *aikidō* in several languages scattered in private archives and libraries, as well as discussion with a member of the Ōmoto organisation, consultation of library resources and quality internet sites.

By positioning *aikidō* within a religious context, this work aims to provide a clearer understanding of the origins of *aikidō* in Japanese spirituality and the intent of its founder. In so doing, it hopes to contribute to removing some of the confusion which has surrounded this art's role as spiritual technique since it spread outside Japan.

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CONVENTIONS

Proper names are given according to Japanese usage, family name first and personal name last. Except for proper names, Japanese terms are given in italics, transcribed according to the standard Hepburn system. Chinese and Sanskrit words are also in italics.

Introduction

Spirituality in relation to the martial arts of East Asia is frequently mentioned in popular literature but has rarely been the subject of academic study. This is a considerable omission since these arts have formed an intrinsic part of the culture of numerous countries in that region for hundreds of years, and evidence of their close links with philosophical and religious traditions is strong. Among the modern martial arts most often mentioned in relation to the term “spirituality” is the Japanese martial art *aikidō*, created by the martial artist Ueshiba Morihei (1883-1969) in Japan in the 1940s as the fruition of a long life of experience of various Japanese sword and unarmed martial arts. Ueshiba was an intensely spiritual man, deeply immersed throughout his life in the practices of several Japanese religious traditions, and it is clear from his writings and records of his oral teachings that he saw the practice of *aikidō* (合気道, usually translated as “Way of Harmony of Ki”),¹ as a spiritual journey. Describing *aikidō*, Ueshiba said:

True Budo [martial way] is to become one with the universe or, it is to return to the unity of the self with the universe...Although some may ask if the Aiki of my budo comes from religion, it is not so. The True Budo shines forth and illuminates religion. It is a guide which leads incomplete religion to perfection.²

In this statement he made clear his view that the *aikidō* he created was spiritually oriented, even though practice of it did not require the framework of any

¹ The term *ki* (*qi* or *ch'i* in Chinese) is difficult to translate into English, but can be considered here as the psychophysical energy at the basis of all phenomena. A more detailed explanation is given in Chapter One (see page 44). The name *aikidō* was officially adopted in 1942. From 1922 to 1936 the art was known as *aiki-bujutsu* (and occasionally as Ueshiba-ryū), and from 1936 to 1941 (when it was assimilated into the Japanese martial arts organisation, the Butokukai), as *aiki-budō*. See Ueshiba Kisshōmaru, *The Spirit of Aikido*, trans. Taitetsu Unno (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1984), 98-100. According to several sources, at the end of his life Ueshiba wanted to change the name to *shobu aiki* “the martial way for the creation of wisdom and character” - see William Gleason, *The Spiritual Foundations of Aikido* (Rochester, Vt.: Destiny Books, 1995), 5.

² Ueshiba Morihei, “Excerpts from the Writings and Transcribed Lectures of the Founder, Morihei Ueshiba,” *Aiki News*, no. 52 (1983): 7.



recognised Japanese or other religion. Ueshiba's descriptions of *aikidō* are in marked contrast both to the common assumption, propagated by the movie image of the martial arts, that they concern only fighting, and to the view prevalent among academics that any "spiritual" content can be explained as political or cultural ideology of a temporal nature, rather than as signifying insight of transcendent value.

Until now, few attempts have been made to explore the spiritual aspects of the Japanese martial arts and to show how a martial art could act as a spiritual exercise despite appearing to be concerned only with practical efficiency or recreation. Against such assessments, made largely from a Western cultural perspective, stands Ueshiba's claim that his *aikidō* was an art of peace, not conflict, and his equal insistence that it was not a sport. The aim of this research, therefore, is to demonstrate, using the example of *aikidō*, how a martial art can perform the function of a spiritual discipline.

Those academic studies of martial arts which have given any consideration at all to their spiritual aspects have, with only a few exceptions, such as the *kendō* practitioner and Buddhist studies specialist Kiyota Minoru's study of the Japanese martial art *kendō*,³ devoted only a small part of the work to the spiritual aspects. Until now, no academic study of the spiritual content of *aikidō* has been undertaken, although a few works aimed at the general reader, notably William Gleason's *Spiritual Foundations of Aikido*⁴ and several books by the French authors J. D. Cauhépé⁵ and A. Kuang, have begun to open up the field. The aim of this research will be to contribute a synthesis, drawing together

³ Kiyota Minoru, *Kendō: Its Philosophy, History, and Means to Personal Growth* (London, New York: Kegan Paul International, 1994).

⁴ Gleason, *The Spiritual Foundations of Aikido*.

⁵ Jean-Daniel Cauhépé (b. 1933) was one of the first French *aikidō* practitioners, who began training with Abe Tadashi in France in 1952. In 1995 he founded his own *aikidō* school, L'Ecole d'Aikidō de Sumikiri. See Guy Bonnefond and Louis Clériot, *Histoire de l'aikido 50 ans de présence en France* (Noisy-sur-Ecole: Budo Editions, 2000), 218.

the strands of influence on *aikidō* from several religious traditions, in order to bring more evidence to bear to show how a martial art can be a means of spiritual development. *Aikidō* has been chosen because of the clarity of its founder's intent and because it is an art of which this author has direct experience.

Such a study is particularly appropriate at a juncture in world history when new spiritualities are emerging in response to the perceived failure of modern science to answer fundamental questions about life's meaning, and the awareness that human beings are increasingly alienated from their environment. These issues, as will be seen, are singularly pertinent to the practice of *aikidō*, an art based on non-confrontational spherical and spiralic movement which claims to reintegrate the human person into the life of the cosmos.

Ueshiba began to develop a distinctive martial art style in the 1930s, but it is *aikidō* in the mature form in which it emerged after World War II, when he reformulated it as an art of peace and reconciliation, that is the focus of this study. From the 1940s, when it was known to only a relatively small group of practitioners, *aikidō* has spread worldwide and is today estimated to be practised in at least forty-two countries.⁶ For many reasons, *aikidō* has been subject to considerable fragmentation in the last fifty years, so it should be emphasised that the form of *aikidō* to be examined here is the art as it was created by Ueshiba in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This research does not concern the earlier forms (known as Daito-ryū aiki jūjutsu or *aiki-budō*)⁷ in which it appeared during its gestation and which are still practised, except as they served as stepping-stones to *aikidō*'s later form. Nor is it concerned with the many derivative forms created

⁶ The International Aikido Federation in Tokyo lists forty-two national member federations. See *IAF Member Nations and their Organisation Name* [Electronic directory] (International Aikido Federation, 2003 [accessed on 2003]), available from <http://www.aikido-international.org/php/members.php>. In addition, there are many *aikidō* schools which are not members of the federation.

⁷ The word *aiki* was added to Daito-ryū jūjutsu in 1922 (see page 54).

subsequently by leading students of Ueshiba.⁸ Some, although not all, of these may have equally valid claims as techniques of spiritual discipline, but for reasons of space, as well as expertise, it is not possible to examine all of them here.

As observed, academic scholarship in Western languages on most aspects of the martial arts is sparse. Japanese scholars have shown more interest but the field is still under-researched. There are a number of reasons why this is so. For instance, although many martial arts differ radically from sports, there has been a tendency to classify them all as sporting activities, and thus subject them, as G. Cameron Hurst III notes, to the prejudice in human culture that sports are “peripheral to ‘real’ human activity”.⁹ Also, few researchers have both the academic and martial arts’ expertise to treat the subject well.

Another deterrent has been the difficulty of approaching a subject which, as Thomas Green observes, defies the “Eurocentric distinctions” drawn in Western culture between “art and life, the aesthetic and the utilitarian, work and sport, and art and science”.¹⁰ Determining the boundaries of martial arts is extremely difficult for they impinge on a number of established academic disciplines, including history, religion, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, physiology, psychology, cross-cultural studies and sport science. Studies of the martial arts have been undertaken from several of these perspectives but no consistent methodology has yet been satisfactorily devised as an approach to their study.

⁸ Examples include: Shin-shin Toitsu Aikidō, Shin’ei Taïdo, Yoseikan, Yoshinkan, Tomiki Aikidō, Tendo-ryū Aikidō, Kinomichi, the Katsugen-kai, Aikidō de sumikiri, Nippon-Kan Aikidō and Iwama-ryū. Stanley Pranin comments on the “diversity of approaches to Aikido” now extant which many practitioners are “typically unaware of” (see Stanley Pranin, “Aikido Publications and Politics,” *Aiki News*, no. 68 (August 1985): 4).

⁹ G. Cameron Hurst III, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan - Swordsmanship and Archery* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 5.

¹⁰ Thomas A. Green, “Introduction,” in *Martial Arts of the World an Encyclopedia*, ed. Thomas A. Green (Oxford: ABC-Clio, 2001), xvi.

Among Western researchers of the martial arts, Cameron Hurst III, Winston L. King, Karl Friday and Seki Humitake, and Oscar Ratti and Adèle Westbrook have adopted historical approaches. The former's historical survey of Japan's sword arts and archery provides an essential corrective for many of the inaccuracies that bedevil popular literature on the martial arts. Ratti and Westbrook's historical survey of samurai arts¹¹ gives considerable technical detail and devotes some attention to the samurai's spiritual interests but is not wholly concerned with this aspect. King takes a historical-philosophical approach to the interest of the samurai in Zen Buddhism, providing more thoughtful insights than appear in the many superficial popular works on the subject.¹² Friday's monograph gives a detailed study of the Japanese sword school, the Kashima-Shinryū, including some attention to its spiritual training methods, and provides probably the most detailed exposition yet available in English of esoteric terminology used in the martial arts.¹³

Among scholarship devoted specifically to spirituality in the martial arts, the most notable general study is Michael Maliszewski's panoramic survey, the result of ten years' research, of the relationship of the martial arts of nine countries, including Japan, to meditative-religious and spiritual traditions.¹⁴ This is a useful general overview of the extent of religious influences on the martial arts. Peter Payne¹⁵ provides a succinct summary of the main elements, such as breathing, perception, resonance and rhythm, which allow for spirituality in the martial arts. Another interesting contribution is Terence Dukes' comprehensive

¹¹ Oscar Ratti and Adèle Westbrook, *Secrets of the Samurai the Martial Arts of Feudal Japan* (Edison, N.J.: Castle Books, 1999).

¹² Winston L. King, *Zen and the Way of the Sword - Arming the Samurai Psyche* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹³ Karl F. Friday and Seki Humitake, *Legacies of the Sword: The Kashima-Shinryū and Samurai Martial Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1997).

¹⁴ Michael Maliszewski, *Spiritual Dimensions of the Martial Arts* (Rutland, Vt. and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1996).

¹⁵ Peter Payne, *Martial Arts the Spiritual Dimension*, 1997 Reprint ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981).

work¹⁶ on the Buddhist origins of the Chinese martial art *ch'uan fa* which, he says, has directly influenced the Japanese unarmed combat style of *jūjutsu*, whose forms contributed to *aikidō*. Rupert Cox¹⁷ has explored links between Zen Buddhism and *shorinji kempo* from an anthropological viewpoint, and Phillip Zarrilli has referred to relationships with Hatha yoga in his ethnographic study of the Indian martial art *kalaripayatti*.¹⁸ Kiyota¹⁹ and Jeffrey L. Dann²⁰ have researched personal growth and self-cultivation methods in relation to *kendō*. Other scholars, such as William Bodiford²¹ or Stephen Chan,²² have tended to diminish the significance of spirituality in the martial arts, arguing that their “so-called” spiritual vocabulary was part of a superimposed political ideology.

Although academic research on the martial arts is limited, a number of scholars have, in the last decade, produced studies of *aikidō* from various angles. This scholarship includes, for instance, studies of *aikidō* in relation to self-actualisation, psychotherapy, the sociosomatics of tactility and kinesthesia, and mind-body awareness in the face of danger. The research most relevant to this study includes the dissertations of Peter Boylan,²³ Ueno Yuji,²⁴ Marcus W.

¹⁶ Shifu Terence Dukes, *The Bodhisattva Warriors: The Origin, Inner Philosophy, History and Symbolism of the Buddhist Martial Art within India and China* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1994).

¹⁷ Rupert A. Cox, *The Zen Arts an Anthropological Study of the Culture of Aesthetic Form in Japan* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

¹⁸ Phillip B. Zarrilli, *When the Body Becomes All Eyes: Paradigms, Discourses and Practices of Power in Kalaripayatti a South-Indian Martial Art* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁹ Kiyota, *Kendō*.

²⁰ Jeffrey L. Dann, "'Kendo' in Japanese Martial Culture: Swordsmanship as Self-Cultivation" (PhD, University of Washington, 1978).

²¹ William M. Bodiford, "Religion and Spiritual Development: Japan," in *Martial Arts of the World an Encyclopedia*, ed. Thomas A. Green (Oxford: ABC-Clio, 2001), 472-505.

²² Stephen Chan, "The Construction and Export of Culture as Artefact: The Case of Japanese Martial Arts," *Body & Society* 6, no. 1 (2000): 69-74.

²³ Peter Boylan, "Aikido as Spiritual Practice in the United States" (MA dissertation, Western Michigan University, 1999).

²⁴ Ueno Yuji, "Eastern Philosophy and the Rise of the Aikido Movement" (Ph.D, University of Toronto, 1995).

Grandon²⁵ and C. Jeffrey Dykhuizen.²⁶ Boylan took an anthropological approach to his study of whether *aikidō* was a form of religious practice for Americans. Although valuable in revealing the depth of many practitioners' commitment to the art, this study centred on whether *aikidō* practitioners viewed Ueshiba as a superhuman being. Ueno's cultural anthropological research aimed to explain practitioners' motives for practising *aikidō* and to investigate the nature of their perceptions of *ki*, a concept also examined by Grandon. Dykhuizen's article, based on his doctoral thesis, investigated how *aikidō* instructors in two cultures (Japan and the United States) represented *aikidō*-related concepts, and concluded that instructors played a significant role in mediating the meaning of these concepts.

What is lacking in this literature, however, is a systematic attempt, as proposed by this research, to compare the core concepts and spiritual exercises of several Japanese religious traditions with the world view and training method of a martial art. As there is no established methodology for such a study, the approach will be both comparative and analytical, with a philosophical rather than historical emphasis. Some historical context will be given, however, principally to demonstrate how the various Japanese religions have come to share common features (which explains their compatibility in *aikidō*), as well as some aspects of Ueshiba's attitude and discourse which would otherwise risk being misunderstood.

Study of spirituality in the martial arts is fraught with difficulties. As Deborah Klens-Bigman remarked on attending the first World Congress on Combat Sports and Martial Arts in Amiens, France, in spring 2002, the "martial arts are more than just a physical pursuit, but it's extremely difficult to discuss

²⁵ Marcus William Grandon, "The Practice and Philosophy of Aikido with Special Emphasis on Ki" (MA dissertation, California State University, 1995).

²⁶ C. Jeffrey Dykhuizen, "Training in Culture: The Case of Aikido Education and Meaning-Making Outcomes in Japan and the United States," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 24, no. 6 (2000): 741-61.

their non-physical aspects". Anthropologists and social scientists, she said, have struggled with the topic.²⁷ Bodiford has similarly pointed out: "Modern authors frequently address aspects of Japanese cosmos and ethos under the Western rubrics of religion and spiritual development. Even in Western contexts, however, the terms religion and spiritual lack consistent and generally accepted definitions. It should not be surprising, therefore, that their application to Japanese contexts is frequently problematic. Nowhere are problems more abundant than in accounts of Japanese martial arts and religion."²⁸

The first difficulty, as Bodiford indicates, is to arrive at a definition of spirituality, a term often used vaguely and diffusely. Two contemporary general definitions of the concept, however, provide sufficiently focused criteria for this study. The first describes spirituality, after Andrew Canale, as "the search for connection with one's true self and with a core reality that gives value and meaning to life".²⁹ The second is Caleb Rosado's interpretation of spirituality as "a state of interconnectedness with the Other – the divine, the self, the human, the natural, or any combination thereof – resulting in a state of security with a sense of worthwhile purpose".³⁰ These two complementary definitions, then, will provide the reference points for analysis of spirituality in *aikidō*.

It could be objected that, since Ueshiba stated both that *aikidō* was not a religion and that its principles were universally applicable, there is no particular justification for using Japanese religion as a criterion for spirituality in *aikidō*.

²⁷ Deborah Klens-Bigman, *Spirituality in the Martial Arts - an Overview of the Issues* [Electronic article] (2000[accessed on 14 December 2001]), available from <http://ejmas.com/proceedings/GSJSA00klens.htm>.

²⁸ Bodiford, "Religion and Spiritual Development: Japan," 472.

²⁹ Andrew Canale, "The Cry of the Desperate." In *New Age Spirituality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), cited by James Peterson in *Understanding Spirituality and Spiritual Formation* [Electronic article] (1999 [cited 30 April 2002]); available from <http://www.sanjosepby.org.Refnspirt.html>

³⁰ Caleb Rosado, *What Is Spirituality? Memetics, Quantum Mechanics, and the Spiral of Spirituality* [Electronic article] (Rosado Consulting for Change in Human Systems, 2000 [accessed on 1 May 2002]), available from <http://rosado.net/articles-qumetics.html>.

Here two points should be made. First, one might note that a common response of the Japanese, when questioned about Shintō, for instance, is to call it *michi* (a “Way”) rather than *shūkyō* (religion), whose literal meaning is “sect-teaching”.³¹ Since there is ample evidence that Ueshiba engaged devoutly in numerous spiritual practices of Japanese religions, incorporated them into *aikidō* and described *aikidō* in the language of Japanese spirituality, it is in the latter sense that his denial of *aikidō* as religion should be understood. In addition, since *aikidō* is based on the concept of *ki*, which is undeniably a fundamental East Asian notion, this research considers it legitimate that an understanding of how *aikidō* relates to spirituality as conceived of in the country of its genesis should be formulated before any research on its universal applicability as spiritual practice is undertaken.

As the multi-volume *World Spirituality* series³² shows, spirituality takes a myriad forms, not all of which are linked closely to any of the world’s main religions. Indeed, the crux of the argument in this work is that *aikidō* is a non-sectarian spiritual discipline. Also, as noted, there is some debate about whether the term “religion” can be appropriately applied to the Japanese context where spirituality may have more to do with ways of living than with observance of ritual. For these reasons, religion is understood here, after Keith Ward, rather loosely as “a belief-system articulating one view of the meaning of human existence”.³³

Chapter One will set the scene by discussing some of the issues surrounding the notion of spirituality in general, and by delineating the

³¹ Stuart D. B. Picken, *Essentials of Shinto an Analytical Guide to Principal Teachings*, ed. Charles Wei-hsun Fu, *Resources in Asian Philosophy and Religion* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), xxiv.

³² At the time of writing, 17 volumes of the 22-volume *World Spirituality* series, the first of which was published in 1985, had been published by Crossroad Publishing, New York.

³³ Keith Ward, “Religion and the Question of Meaning,” in *The Meaning of Life in the World Religions*, ed. Joseph Runzo and Nancy M. Martin, *Library of Global Ethics and Religion* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000), 18.

distinguishing characteristics of Japanese spirituality. Chapter Two will examine the main events in the life of the founder of *aikidō*, the currents of thought which influenced him, and what he said or wrote about *aikidō*. His understanding of the purpose and manner of *aikidō* practice, explained partly through his observations and those of other leading *aikidō* practitioners (hereafter *aikidōka*) will then be compared, in the next four chapters, with the belief systems and spiritual practices of the four religious strands perceived as having most influenced the development of *aikidō*. First to be considered will be Daoism, a Chinese belief system which, nativised in Japan, has pervaded Japanese culture although it never became a separate religion there.³⁴ This will be followed by two chapters concerning the relationship of Buddhist thought to *aikidō*, the first to be treated being Zen Buddhism and the second Shingon *Mikkyō*. Finally, the influence of Shintō and the Shintō-based Japanese new religion, Ōmoto-kyō, with which Ueshiba was closely associated for most of his life, will be examined.

This study draws on several types of sources. The main primary sources are the writings and transcribed lectures of Ueshiba. It should be mentioned that most of these are not widely known because they have appeared (in the original Japanese, with English translation) only in the independent journal, *Aiki News*, or in out-of-print Japanese sources. Archive copies of *Aiki News*, first published in 1974,³⁵ are now also out of print and can be found only in private archives as they are not held in any British university library. Although some of these writings can now be found at *Aikido Journal*-online, they are reproduced there only in English and not all are included. Some other sources consulted were also

³⁴ H. Byron Earhart, *Japanese Religion Unity and Diversity*, ed. Frederick J. Streng, Fourth ed., *Religious Life in History* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2004), 57.

³⁵ *Aiki News* was established in the United States in April 1974 by Stanley Pranin, a practitioner of *aikidō* who has since become its historian. Issues 1 to 29 were published in English and issues 38 to 83 in bilingual English-Japanese format. From 1990 two separate English and Japanese editions have been published. In 1994 the English edition changed its name to *Aikido Journal* and in 1999 went online. This publication in its various forms is one of the most important sources of information about *aikidō*. For Pranin's motivation in establishing *Aiki News* see "Editorial Who are we?," *Aiki News*, no. 61 (May 1984): 2, 18-21.

located with difficulty, such as the pamphlet entitled *Zen et Aiki ne font qu'un*,³⁶ which required a visit to the French Bibliothèque Nationale, or Sunadomari Kanemoto's biography of Ueshiba in Japanese which was acquired through the auspices of the Ōmoto organisation. Another important source is the biography of Ueshiba by his son, Kisshōmaru (1921-1999), which has appeared in English only in extracts.³⁷

As befits a martial artist whose primary mode of expression was through *aikidō* itself, Ueshiba left only a small written legacy. He wrote only two books, both technical manuals: *Budō Renshū* (translated into English as *Budō Training in Aikidō*),³⁸ first published in Japanese in limited edition in 1933, which is prefaced by extracts from his lectures, and *Budō* (published privately in Japanese in 1938 and since translated into English),³⁹ which also includes commentary on the principles of *aikidō* and some poetry. As both were published before Ueshiba's art had thoroughly matured, however, they present an incomplete picture of his thought. A more comprehensive presentation is given in the four lectures published in 1986 as *Takemusu Aiki*.⁴⁰ In addition, there are a number of other articles by Ueshiba.

³⁶ André Nocquet, *Zen et aiki ne font qu'un* (Lezay: Pairault, 1995).

³⁷ Ueshiba Kisshōmaru 植芝吉祥丸編著. 1999. 合気道開祖植芝盛平伝 (*Aikido kaiso Ueshiba Morihei den*) (Tokyo : Shuppan Geijutsusha, 1999).

³⁸ Ueshiba Morihei, *Budo Renshū (Aikidō)* (Tokyo: 1978). Published in English as Ueshiba Morihei, *Budo Training in Aikido*, trans. Larry E. Bieri and Seiko Mabuchi, Revised ed. (Tokyo, Japan: Sugawara Martial Arts Institute, Japan Publications, 1997). According to Yonekawa Shigemi, this book was planned as a *mokuroku* (transmission scroll), to be handed out to Ueshiba's students (see *Aiki News*, no. 36 (May 1980): 7).

³⁹ Akazawa Zenzaburō, who trained with Ueshiba before World War II, says that only a few hundred copies of the original 49-page edition of this technical training manual were distributed. It consists of an introductory section which includes short essays on the "nature and meaning of martial arts", and twenty-six *haiku* by Ueshiba. This is followed by a presentation of about forty-eight techniques with accompanying photographs. The manual was rediscovered in 1981 (see *Aiki News*, no. 42 (November 1981): 2) and has since been published in English as Morihei Ueshiba, *Budo Teachings of the Founder of Aikido*, trans. John Stevens (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1991).

⁴⁰ Ueshiba Morihei 植芝盛平, 武産合気 (*Takemusu aiki*) ed. Takahashi Hideo 高橋 英雄 (著) (Tokyo: Byakko Shinkōkai, 1986).

Other important secondary sources of information on *aikidō* consulted are the recollections of *aikidōka* who trained with Ueshiba, recorded as interviews or as authored books. As there are today more than 500 books about *aikidō*, mostly technical manuals of varying quality, citation is from the profounder works. Secondary sources consulted also include studies of Japanese religion, history and culture.

Chapter One: Spirituality in the martial arts

Part One - Issues and obstacles

The Western mind, steeped in rationality and Cartesian logic, often finds it hard to imagine a “spirituality” which is experiential rather than doctrinal, and therefore has difficulty with the idea that the martial arts could be in any way concerned with the spiritual life.⁴¹ Eastern philosophy and religion, however, being generally based on a different understanding of the human person (see page 40), and holding that the discursive, reasoning mind is an obstacle to apprehension of ultimate reality, provide a context open to the notion that the martial arts, which may offer opportunities for the development of intuition and a different kind of knowing, could be modes of spiritual discipline.

This Chapter aims to lay the foundation for examining spirituality in *aikidō* by investigating, in Part One, some of the conceptual issues that have hindered appreciation of spirituality in the martial arts. Part Two will then identify essential aspects of Japanese views of core reality and show how methods to apprehend the reality thus conceived lend themselves to use of the body in spiritual practice.

Ueshiba Morihei in his later years spoke incessantly of *aikidō* in spiritual terms. It was, he said, “a religion without being a religion”,⁴² a means of *misogi* (purification), a method of practising harmony with the divine. For its founder, then, *aikidō* was a composite spiritual practice, a unique form of *shugyō*, traditional Japanese ascetic practice which the Japanese philosopher Yuasa

⁴¹ For a discussion of the effect of Cartesian assumptions on the Western sociology of the body, see Chikako Ozawa-De Silva, “Beyond the Body/Mind? Japanese Contemporary Thinkers on Alternative Sociologies of the Body,” *Body & Society* 8, no. 2 (2002). *Aikidō*’s challenge to the notion of “cause and effect” is described in George Leonard, “Aikido and the Mind of the West,” in *The Overlook Martial Arts Reader Classic Writings on Philosophy and Technique*, ed. Randy F. Nelson (Woodstock, N.Y.: The Overlook Press, 1989), 177.

⁴² Ueshiba Morihei 植芝 盛平, 武産合気 一 (“Takemusu aiki 1”). In 武産合気 (*Takemusu aiki*), ed. Takahashi Hideo 高橋 英雄 (著). (Tokyo: Byakkō Shinkōkai, 1986), 36.

Yasuo has defined as “inseparable from the ideal of spiritual enhancement”.⁴³ In contrast, some contemporary scholars have cast doubt on the authentic spiritual content of any of the modern Japanese martial arts, which they view as having been entirely re-cast since the 1868 Meiji Restoration in the conceptual framework of Western sports. They see the modern martial arts both as influenced by the secular values of Western physical education, and as simultaneously (during the pre-World War II period particularly) infused with the reinvented values of *budō* and *bushidō*, whose validity as vehicles of true spirituality they regard with suspicion, an issue that will be discussed in more detail below.

Bodiford, for example, states that “the [Japanese] government promoted the transformation of martial arts into a particular type of ‘spiritual education’ (*seishin kyōiku*)” and included them in school curricula in order to foster a military spirit in schoolchildren for ideological ends.⁴⁴ Cameron Hurst III, meanwhile, considers that the “religious element, especially the Zen Buddhist element”, can be “overstressed” in the modern Japanese martial arts of *kendō* and *kyūdō* (archery). Nor does he see any significant difference between some self-improvement aspects of the Western sporting tradition and the ethos of Japanese martial arts.⁴⁵ This view is shared by Allen Guttmann and Lee Thompson who deny any relation to the “transcendental realm of the sacred” in modern Japanese sports, among which they infer inclusion of *aikidō*.⁴⁶ Stephen

⁴³ Yuasa Yasuo, “Forward,” in *Science and Comparative Philosophy Introducing Yuasa Yasuo* (Leiden: E J Brill, 1989), 241.

⁴⁴ Bodiford, “Religion and Spiritual Development: Japan,” 476.

⁴⁵ Cameron Hurst III, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan*, 198-9.

⁴⁶ Allen Guttmann and Lee Thompson, *Japanese Sports: A History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 3.

Chan similarly sees the modern martial arts as of twentieth-century origin and as oriented towards the needs of an industrial society.⁴⁷

Martial arts after the Meiji Restoration

During the period of rapid modernisation and industrialisation which followed the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan's traditional martial arts underwent profound change. In the first three decades after that event, they "went into serious decline as the ideas of 'civilization and enlightenment' undercut the perceived values of martial arts" both in ethical and physical fitness terms.⁴⁸

By 1876, the samurai had been dispossessed, losing both the privilege of wearing swords and their status in society.⁴⁹ Swordsmanship, which was at that time the most widespread martial art, almost died out but was saved from extinction by three fortuitous developments: the staging of public martial arts' demonstrations (from 1872) by the famous swordsman Sakakibara Kenkichi;⁵⁰ the decision to have fencing taught to the Tokyo Metropolitan Police (established in 1874) on the grounds that it was "of great value in training character and instilling diligence";⁵¹ and the creation (in 1895) of the Dai Nihon Butokukai (Great Japan Martial Virtue Association) which coincided with the patriotic fervour generated by the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War. By this time the "rage for things Western had peaked",⁵² and interest in the traditional martial arts had started to revive.

It did so, however, under the influence of newly imported ideas concerning education, and in a changed social climate in which martial artists

⁴⁷ Chan, "The Construction and Export of Culture as Artefact: The Case of Japanese Martial Arts," 74.

⁴⁸ Cameron Hurst III, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan*, 148.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 158.

sought to adapt their skills to the modern world. For example, for practical reasons, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police began standardising the many disparate styles of traditional swordsmanship. This standardisation was taken further by the Dai Nihon Butokukai which played a leading role in establishing “both facilities and standards for the teaching of *kendō* and other martial arts”.⁵³ In 1911, *kendō* was introduced into the curriculum of Japanese schools.⁵⁴ By this time, however, it was substantially different both in *kata* (forms of technique) and ethos from the swordsmanship of pre-Meiji times.

While these developments were taking place in *kendō*, another traditional martial art, *jūjutsu*,⁵⁵ was undergoing transformation by Kanō Jigorō (1860-1938) who founded the Kōdōkan *jūdō* organisation in 1882.⁵⁶ Inoue Shun attributes Kanō’s success to his “embrace” of the scientific method and institutional innovation that enhanced its appeal and secured a mass clientele.⁵⁷ Kanō selected what he considered to be the best of the traditional *jūjutsu* techniques and systematised them by applying principles of dynamics and human physiology which he described as “best suited to today’s world”. He also invented a new grading system, the “*dan-kyū*” system which proved to be a “successful marketing strategy”.⁵⁸ Inspired by the desire to merge traditional Japanese values (principally, Confucian ethics) with Western views of physical education, Kanō transformed *jūjutsu* into a “‘national sport’ (*kokugi*) and body culture”.⁵⁹ He saw *jūdō*’s goal as being “to perfect oneself and contribute something to the world” and to educate “capable citizens”. His view of

⁵³ Ibid., 161.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 163.

⁵⁵ A grappling art based on the principle of *jū*, meaning “pliancy” or “flexibility”.

⁵⁶ Cameron Hurst III, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan*, 162.

⁵⁷ Inoue Shun, “The Invention of the Martial Arts: Kano Jigoro and Kodokan Judo,” in *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*, ed. Stephen Vlastos (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 164.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 167.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 164.

“goodness” was “something that promotes the continuing development of collective and social life”.⁶⁰ In other words, Kanō saw *jūdō* as an educational activity that blended Western physiological knowledge with the body movements of the traditional Japanese martial arts and inculcation of Confucian values. Noting these strongly social, ethical and educational aims, Guttman and Thompson quote Jörg Möller as writing: “Kanō saw *jūdō* first and foremost as a spiritual discipline in which Confucian virtues should dominate”.⁶¹

Clear statements of social goals such as Kanō’s, together with the introduction of Western-style competition, rules and standardisation into modern Japanese martial arts for social or political purposes, are among the reasons that have led scholars to consider claims of transcendent spirituality in the martial arts as unfounded.

Their perspective, however, subsumes all the modern martial arts under one heading and fails to take account of *aikidō*’s different history. Ueshiba’s *aikidō* in its mature form developed after World War II and did not have the long history of official sanction which *jūdō* and *kendō* enjoyed. In its earlier form of *aiki-budō*, it was patronised by the military but was not introduced into schools, nor did Ueshiba make any attempt to have it popularised in that way. Ueshiba, as will be seen, was inspired by concerns which differed in many respects from those of Kanō, as Tomiki Kenji,⁶² a martial artist who studied under both teachers, reportedly observed:

The two teachers were diametrically opposite; Kano Sensei was philosophical and scientific while Ueshiba Sensei was religious and mysterious.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid., 168.

⁶¹ Guttman and Thompson, *Japanese Sports*, 100-1.

⁶² Tomiki Kenji (1900-1979) was a *jūdōka* who trained with Ueshiba from 1926. He taught *aiki-budō* in Manchuria and later established his own style, Tomiki Aikidō. See Stanley Pranin (ed.), *The Aiki News Encyclopedia of Aikido* (Tokyo: Aiki News, 1991), 123.

⁶³ Ueshiba Kisshōmaru, *Aikido Kaiso Ueshiba Morihei Den*, Kaiteiban ed. (Tokyo: Shuppan Geijutsusha, 1999), 176-7.

Tomiki commented that the person who most influenced Kanō was an American from Harvard University, Professor Ernest Fenellosa: "At that time, however, Western things were held in much higher esteem and were judged to be of more value than things Japanese".⁶⁴ Ueshiba himself identified the difference between *aikidō*, *jūdō* and *kendō* as being that the former was not concerned with "winning".⁶⁵ As will be shown, this difference has implications for spirituality in *aikidō*.

In order to understand better the different objectives of the two men, it is useful to recall here the definition of spirituality adopted in this work, that is as "the search for connection with one's true self and with a core reality that gives value and meaning to life", and as an achieved state "of interconnectedness with the Other – the divine, the self, the human, the natural, or any combination thereof". The essence of this definition, which concurs with a number of other definitions consulted,⁶⁶ is its emphasis on an ultimate concern, with something that Owen Thomas, discussing the views of the philosopher of religion Paul Tillich, describes as "unconditional, total, infinite, and transcends all preliminary concerns".⁶⁷ This is clearly not the same as a temporal transitory concern, such as producing a particular type of citizen for short-term political reasons.

Another way of illustrating the difference is by reference to the distinction drawn by the Japanese scholar (and contemporary of Ueshiba) Suzuki Daisetz

⁶⁴ Stanley Pranin (ed.), *Aikido Masters Prewar Students of Morihei Ueshiba*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Aiki News, 1993), 44-46.

⁶⁵ Ueshiba Morihei, "Interview with Morihei Ueshiba (1)," *Aiki News*, no. 75 (1987): 6.

⁶⁶ See, for example, the *World Spirituality Series* definition, in Takeuchi (ed.) Yoshinori, *Buddhist Spirituality: Later China, Korea, Japan, and the Modern World*, ed. Ewert Cousins, vol. 9, *World Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999), xii. And the University of Denver Center for Spirituality statement that "Spirituality is a process whereby we open ourselves to connection and relationship – connection with others, with ourselves, with nature, with the universe, and with God, or whatever else the individual may take to be ultimate" at University of Denver Center for Spirituality, [Website] (1999), available from <http://www.du.edu/wellness/cfs/>.

⁶⁷ Owen C. Thomas, *Political Spirituality: Oxymoron or Redundancy?* [Electronic journal article] (Center for the Study of Religion and Society, 2001[accessed on 2002]), available from <http://moses.creighton.edu/jrs/2001/2001-3a.html>.

Teitaro (1870-1960 – see page 102), in his commentary on Japanese spirituality in 1944, between the two Japanese terms for spirituality: *seishin* (精神) and *reisei* (霊性). He identifies “a man of the spirit (*seishin-ka*)” as a person dedicated to a moral ideal but notes that this attitude still remains within the realm of “dualistic thought”. The second term, however, has in his view more transcendent connotations: “*Seishin* has an ethical character which *reisei* transcends – although this transcendence does not imply negation or denial. *Seishin* is founded in the discriminatory consciousness; *reisei* is non-discriminatory wisdom.”⁶⁸ It is in the sense of *reisei* that this study attempts to identify spirituality in *aikidō*.

Sports and the sacred/secular dichotomy

The second argument advanced by critics of the idea of spirituality in the martial arts is that martial arts today are sports which are by definition secular activities. This is the contention of Guttmann and Thompson, for example, who, by including *aikidō* in their book,⁶⁹ imply that it is a secular pursuit. There are two fallacies in this contention, however. First, *aikidō* as Ueshiba created and practised it did not fit their seven criteria for defining sport: secularism; equality; bureaucratisation; specialisation; rationalisation; quantification and the obsession with records.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Japanese Spirituality*, trans. Norman Waddell (Japan: Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, 1972), 11-17.

⁶⁹ Guttmann and Thompson, *Japanese Sports*.

⁷⁰ *Aikidō* was organised and bureaucratised only in the 1950s (when Ueshiba was living in the countryside at Iwama), mainly on the initiative of his son, Ueshiba Kisshōmaru, and other prominent practitioners. See Kisshōmaru's comments on the beginnings of the administrative organisation in the mid-1950s, the spread of *aikidō* to Japanese universities, and the inauguration of the International Aikido Federation in 1976 in Ueshiba Kisshōmaru, *Aikido*, trans. Larry E. Bieri (Tokyo: Hozansha Publications, 1985), 163-64. The first to teach *aikidō* in the West were Mochizuki Minoru (1907-2003), who travelled to France in 1951, and Tohei Koichi (1920-) who went to Hawaii in 1953. According to many accounts, Ueshiba's teaching was unsystematic and it was his successors who rationalised the techniques. Ueshiba did confer dan grades (the grading system was adopted from *jūdō*), but was adamantly opposed to competition. See, for example, Pranin's theory that “the styles of aikido widely practiced today have little to do technically and philosophically with the art of the founder” in Stanley Pranin, *Is O-Sensei Really the Father of*

Second, even if it did, it should not thereby be assumed that sport has no relation to spirituality. One could note, for example, that sport was almost universally a sacred activity until the modern era.⁷¹ Kiyota saw no incompatibility between modern *kendō*'s status as a sport (which, after Joseph W. Elder and Robert O'Ray, he defined as "a non-coercive leisure-time activity" allowing a "change of attitude in minds ordinarily focused on making a living"), and its ability to provide "physical and mental enhancement".⁷²

Carolyn Thomas, meanwhile, has referred to the "higher state of consciousness" that may arise from the "keen awareness of self and world"⁷³ sometimes achieved in sport. She notes, however, that, "The true mystical union...where thought and action become inseparable" may be difficult to achieve in sport which focuses on external targets, and that the body awareness practices of Zen Buddhism or Daoism, for instance, are "grounded in an entire lifestyle", that is, not only in the fixed hours of sporting activity.⁷⁴

The essential issue is not so much the notion of sport itself, as of the competition included in sport. It is interesting that the question of whether competition should be included in *aikidō* was the subject of a vigorous debate on the bulletin board of the *Aikido Journal* web site in 2001.⁷⁵ Those in favour of introducing competition saw *aikidō* as a secular activity, while those who viewed it as a spiritual practice saw competition as destructive of *aikidō*'s spiritual

Modern Aikido? [Electronic article] (Aikido Journal online, [accessed on 2003]), available from <http://www.aikidojournal.com/new/article.asp?ArticleID=34>.

⁷¹ Allen Guttman, "Modernization," in *Encyclopedia of World Sport from Ancient Times to the Present*, ed. David Levinson and Karen Christensen (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 254.

⁷² Kiyota, *Kendō*, 1.

⁷³ Carolyn E. Thomas, "Sports," in *Spirituality and the Secular Quest*, ed. Peter H. Van Ness, *World Spirituality* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 513.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 514.

⁷⁵ *The Place of Competition in Aikido* [Bulletin Board discussion] (Aikido Journal Online, 2001[accessed on 2001]), available from <http://www.aikidojournal.com/ubb/Forum9/HTML/000307.html>.

content. As the French *aikidōka* André Protin notes, competition, with its incentive to be “the best, the strongest, the fastest or national of a country with the most medals”⁷⁶ reinforces the Western concept of the human person in which separation (of the individual) and body-mind dualism predominate. In his view, too, its requirement for standardisation inhibits creativity. For reasons which will be discussed below, this body-mind paradigm runs counter to spirituality as defined in this work.

Whatever the views of modern *aikidōka*, Ueshiba made clear his opinion that sport was not a spiritual activity:

Sports are games and pastimes that do not involve the spirit. They are competitions only between physical bodies and not between souls. Thus, they are competitions merely for the sake of pleasure. The Japanese martial arts are a competition in how we can express and realize love that unites and protects everything in harmony and helps this world to prosper.⁷⁷

According to Tsuda Itsuo (1914-1984), Ueshiba saw the martial arts as being of two types: “*haku-no-budo*” motivated by physical desires (to defend oneself or conquer) and “*kon-no-budo*”, spiritual martial arts in which spirit and matter were not opposed.⁷⁸ As will be shown in the following chapters, it was the latter that interested Ueshiba.

Another reason why spirituality in *aikidō* has not been well appreciated by scholars may be that Ueshiba taught mostly by example and did not formulate a codified doctrine. Although some articles and books for the general reader today

⁷⁶ André Protin, *Aikido un art martial, une autre manière d'être*, Collection “Horizons Spirituels” (St Jean de Braye: Editions Dangles, 1977), 188.

⁷⁷ Ueshiba Morihei 植芝 盛平, 武産合気 二 (“Takemusu aiki 2”). In 武産合気 (*Takemusu aiki*), ed. Takahashi Hideo 高橋 英雄 (著). (Tokyo: Byakkō Shinkōkai, 1986), 50.

⁷⁸ Tsuda Itsuo, *La Voie des dieux, Ecole de la Respiration* (Paris: Le Courrier du Livre, 1982), 99. Tsuda was an *aikidōka* who studied under Ueshiba Morihei and relocated to France in 1970 where he established the Katsugen Kai.

refer to the “philosophy” of *aikidō*,⁷⁹ this is somewhat misleading since Ueshiba’s *aikidō* was manifestly not “entirely intellectual” and allowing of “no role for faith or revelation” as a strict definition of the term would imply.⁸⁰ However, insofar as philosophy means “love of wisdom” it would be appropriate to use it to describe Ueshiba’s outlook. Ueshiba does not appear as a philosopher in the sense of a purveyor of systematic instruction, but this study will follow Ninian Smart’s reasoning concerning philosopher-types and conclude that it is possible to “extract a worldview” from Ueshiba’s thinking and living.⁸¹

This has been sufficient to lead a number of *aikidōka* to ask if *aikidō* could be considered a religion,⁸² thus prompting other questions about the adequacy of the term “secular” to describe an activity that is outside the religious framework but at the same time does not appear to be wholly secular in aim. The questions become even more acute in relation to the role of *aikidō* outside Japan,⁸³ but this would be the subject of another research project.

In many respects, *aikidō* does not have the hallmarks of an established religion, yet its founder drew extensively on the vocabulary and practices of Japanese religions. The first question to ask, then, is whether spirituality is possible outside religion; secondly, if such spirituality is possible, how can it be reliably identified? In answer to the first question, it can be noted with Rosado that the secularised view of the world in which science and reason predominate is a creation of the sixteenth to twentieth centuries and that until then, in the

⁷⁹ For example, John Stevens, *The Philosophy of Aikido* (Tokyo and New York: Kodansha International, 2001).

⁸⁰ Rosemary Goring (ed.), *Larousse Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions* (Edinburgh: Larousse, 1992), 402.

⁸¹ Ninian Smart, *World Philosophies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 6.

⁸² Tuomas Martikainen, *Is Aikido a Religion?* [Electronic article] (The Aikido FAQ, 2001), available from <http://www.aikidofaq.com/philosophy/religion.html>.

⁸³ See, for example, comments on this issue by the chairman of the International Aikido Federation in Peter Goldsbury, *Touching the Absolute: Aikido Vs. Religion and Philosophy* [Electronic article] (Aikido Journal, 2001 [accessed on 2002]), available from http://www.aikidojournal.com/articles/_article.asp?ArticleID=1091.

West, the main framework for viewing the world was religious.⁸⁴ Secularisation theory, then, is a fairly recent creation. Although the theory caught on, its inadequacy as an explanation of human aspirations has become increasingly apparent since the latter half of the twentieth century when social phenomena have been observed which do not fit neatly into either compartment of the secular/sacred dichotomy. Scholars have commented, for example, on the rise of what have been termed, somewhat paradoxically, “secular spiritualities”, such as New Age spiritualities, holistic health practices and psychotherapies.⁸⁵

Although the emergence of these phenomena was particularly striking in the twentieth century, it had precedents in history. David Aune, for example, holds that the Greek philosophers’ worldview was one precursor.⁸⁶ He remarks that although spirituality and religion have been closely associated throughout the history of many religious traditions, they are “not indissolubly linked”.⁸⁷ Others, however, still draw a sharp distinction between the spiritual and the secular. Ward, for example, holds that while secular views of human nature, “can speak about intrinsically worthwhile states” and “efficient ways to obtain them”,⁸⁸ they are not concerning themselves with supreme goals and eternal values, and that for “secular views there is no one true goal of life, and there are no supra-human states of any interest”.⁸⁹ In many instances this analysis may hold true, but exceptions must also be acknowledged. To force *aikidō*, for example, which does not qualify as a religion, into the compartment of

⁸⁴ Rosado, *What is Spirituality?* .

⁸⁵ See articles in Peter H. Van Ness (ed.), *Spirituality and the Secular Quest*, vol. 22, *World Spirituality* ed. Ewert Cousins (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996).

⁸⁶ David E. Aune, “Sources in Ancient Greece and Rome,” in *Spirituality and the Secular Quest*, ed. Peter H. Van Ness, *World Spirituality* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996).

⁸⁷ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁸ Ward, “The Meaning of Life,” 22.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 23.

secularism, in this author's opinion reduces the opportunity, from an academic point of view, for considering its spiritual aspects.

Function as a means of evaluating spirituality

To solve the dilemma, the solution suggested here is to employ J. M. Yinger's notion of function as a means of evaluating spirituality in *aikidō*. Yinger has suggested that if an activity performs the same group function as religion, then it at least merits investigation.⁹⁰ By analogy, this study will say that if Ueshiba's *aikidō* performs the same function as spirituality in religion, then it, too, deserves consideration as a spiritual pursuit. This is a not unreasonable proposition given that many practitioners do consider that the Japanese martial arts (*budō*) perform such a function:

It is often asked if budo [martial arts] are a religious system! I would reply that in one sense it is. If by religious we mean the Latin word "religare", which signifies "reconnect", then yes! Budo is religious because it seeks to reconnect the human being to his original divine essence, it strives to show the human person that they are one with the universal and that this unity can be realised by harmonising personality and soul.⁹¹

Issues of terminology: *budō* and *bushidō*

A further source of confusion about spirituality in the martial arts is the imprecision of the English word "spiritual". Thomas points out that, in English, this term was until recently used with specific meanings, associated with the non-cognitive aspects of religion, that is those concerned with emotion and will.⁹² In 1876, for example, the word was defined as "consisting of spirit; not material", "pertaining to the intellectual and higher endowments of the mind",

⁹⁰ J. M. Yinger, "Secular Alternatives to Religious Action," in *The Religious Quest*, ed. Whitfield Foy (London and New York: Routledge in association with the Open University Press, 1978; reprint, 1990), 539.

⁹¹ Michel Coquet, *Budo Ésotérique ou la voie des arts martiaux*, Collection 'Esprit du Budo' (Saint-Martin-le-Vinoux, France: Les Editions de L'Or du Temps, 1985), 27.

⁹² Thomas, *Political Spirituality*.

“pertaining to the moral feelings or states of the soul, as distinguished from external actions”, “controlled and inspired by the divine Spirit”, “Not lay or temporal, relating to sacred things”.⁹³ In contrast, the term has recently witnessed prolific growth and diffusion of meaning such that reference is made to the spiritual in almost all aspects of life.

In relation to the Japanese martial arts, meanwhile, there is a tendency for both the Japanese word *seishin*, and its English translation “spiritual”, to be used in juxtaposition with words such as “ethical” and “moral” in a way which suggests that they are synonymous. As already stated (see page 19), however, spirituality as defined in this research is more in the sense of *reisei*, meaning preoccupation with ultimate concern and action derived from that concern. Although such action may require ethical and moral conduct, the latter are not its prime target.

In this author’s view, a prime source of confusion about spirituality in relation to the martial arts and martial ethics derives from misinterpretation of the Japanese terms *budō* and *bushidō*. These two terms are often used interchangeably and with many variant meanings as shown in these examples from an article by Uzawa Yoshiyuki: “ ‘way of discipline’ aimed at humanity or the formation of human character”, “path of mental discipline”, “formation of character as a social being”, “way of life for the warrior and a code of etiquette”, “the moral virtues of allegiance, courtesy, valor in arms, truthfulness, and simplicity”, and “pursuit of truth and self-discipline undertaken for the sake of forming character through the trinity of mind, technique, and body”.⁹⁴

⁹³ Chauncey A. Goodrich and Noah Porter, *Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*, Revised ed. (London: George Bell & Sons, 1864; reprint, 1876). 1273.

⁹⁴ Uzawa Yoshiyuki, "The Relation of Ethics to Budo and Bushido in Japan" (paper presented at the United-States Japan Conference on Japanese Martial Arts and American Sports Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Means to Personal Growth 1989, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1990), 41-52.

Both terms, like others connoting aspects of the martial arts, are prefixed with the Japanese word *bu* (武 meaning “combat”, derived from the Chinese *wu*, and consisting of two elements, “to stop” and “a spear” which, rendered literally, thus means “to stop a spear”, although there are alternative renderings).⁹⁵ *Shidō*, however, means “the way of the samurai”, while the suffix *-dō* (Chin. *Tao* or *Dao*), meaning “Way”, is employed more widely in relation to a number of Japanese arts.

Modern martial artists often assume that spirituality in the martial arts is to be found in the values of a mythical *bushidō*. Scholarly research has shown, however, that there was no such thing as a fixed warrior code of honour and that the twentieth-century version of it in Japan was an invention based partly on an approximation with Western ethical standards contained in the book *Bushidō the Soul of Japan*.⁹⁶ Written by the Japanese educator and statesman Nitobe Inazō (born 1862)⁹⁷ and published in 1905, this book was the start of the creation of the *bushidō* myth.⁹⁸ As Cameron Hurst III explains, the popular image of a “strict and explicit [samurai] code of ethics called *bushidō*” is inaccurate.⁹⁹ Despite its appearance in the *Hagakure*,¹⁰⁰ the word *bushidō* was rarely used in Tokugawa (1603-1867) times until its appearance in Nitobe’s book. Nitobe was, however, possibly “the least qualified Japanese of his age” to have been writing about Japan’s history and culture since he had been educated mainly in English in special schools and had strong Western associations.¹⁰¹ His aim was to introduce

⁹⁵ Cameron Hurst III, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan*, 8.

⁹⁶ Nitobe Inazō, *Bushido the Soul of Japan*, First Tuttle ed. (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle, 1969; reprint, 1998 reprint).

⁹⁷ According to Kiyota Minoru, Nitobe, a fluent English speaker and a Japanese Christian who studied at various universities outside Japan, was appointed Under Secretary-General of the League of Nations in the 1920s. For biographical details see Kiyota, *Kendō*, 87-9.

⁹⁸ G. Cameron Hurst III, “Death, Honor, and Loyalty: The Bushido Ideal,” *Philosophy East & West* 40, no. 4 (1990): 511-14.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*: 513.

¹⁰⁰ An eighteenth-century text extolling the virtues of *bushidō*.

¹⁰¹ Cameron Hurst III, “Death, Honor, and Loyalty,” 511.

Japan to the West and he thus sought “to translate the samurai ethos into Western ethical standards”.¹⁰²

The book gave the impression that the samurai had a strict code of ethics “whose values were generally seven in number...justice, courage, benevolence, politeness, veracity, honor, and loyalty”.¹⁰³ This idea was later seized on by the Japanese government and Imperial Army and Navy who saw its potential for the construction of the myth of a samurai code of honour incorporating ideas of absolute loyalty and willingness to die which could be harnessed to the Japanese war effort in World War II.¹⁰⁴ The concept of *bushidō* was used at that time by Japan’s military government to instil military spirit in Japan’s youth. In 1938, for example, the Japanese government launched “a movement for national spiritual mobilization (*kokumin seishin sodoin*)” based largely on military values.¹⁰⁵ Robert B. Edgerton has described how the concept of *bushidō* was changed in this way in the 1930s to justify “victory by any means”.¹⁰⁶

Where it did occur in Tokugawa times, historians maintain, *bushidō* referred loosely to codes of behaviour which changed over time, rather than to a rigid code with fixed prescriptions. While Cameron Hurst III and Friday are sceptical about the extent to which such codes were adhered to, particularly since there is ample historical evidence of samurai *disloyalty*, Kiyota gives a more considered analysis of the stages of development of *bushidō*. He maintains that although its meaning varied in different historical periods, there are nevertheless three identifiable themes: loyalty and benevolence, *gi* (a Japanese concept

¹⁰² King, *Zen and the Way of the Sword*, 124.

¹⁰³ Cameron Hurst III, "Death, Honor, and Loyalty," 513.

¹⁰⁴ Karl Friday, *The Historical Foundations of Bushido* [Bulletin board response. First appeared at E-Budo.com] (Koryu Books, 2001), available from <http://koryu.com/library/kfriday2.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Nelson Spinks, "Indoctrination and Re-Education of Japan's Youth," *Pacific Affairs* 17, no. 1 (1944): 57.

¹⁰⁶ Robert B. Edgerton, *Warriors of the Rising Sun: A History of the Japanese Military* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 323-24.

defined as an “internal, personal concept of right and wrong, not one imposed from outside”), and awareness of the aesthetic (which he sees as deriving from the Buddhist concept of impermanence).¹⁰⁷

Although they differ about the content and applicability of samurai codes of conduct, scholars generally agree that such codes did exist in varying forms. The term used to describe them in pre-Meiji times, however, was *budō* rather than *bushidō*. According to Friday, the word *budō* first occurred in print in the thirteenth century, and then more frequently in the Tokugawa period of extended peace when “the motivation held in common by all those who wrote on the ‘way of the warrior’ was a search for the proper role of a warrior class in a world without war”.¹⁰⁸

The words used most often to refer to the martial arts in pre-Meiji times included *bugei* and *hyōhō* (now usually pronounced *heihō* and whose meaning has narrowed to “strategy”) which both date from at least the eighth century, and *bujutsu*, another term used interchangeably with *bugei*.¹⁰⁹ *Budō* in its contemporary meaning of “martial arts” (rather than just specific aspects of martial arts) came into use in the last decade of the nineteenth century. This use of the suffix *-dō* was extended to all the Japanese martial arts’ community in the 1940s by the Dai Nihon Butokukai (established in 1895 to “preserve and propagate the nation’s traditional martial arts”)¹¹⁰ as part of the effort to inspire Japan’s youth and fighting men with fervour for Japanese “spiritual” values. The values thus evoked, however, were largely imaginary, invented for the benefit of successive war efforts, and had little basis in history. But their evocation in this context linked *budō* inexorably with “ultranationalism and the expansionist aims

¹⁰⁷ Kiyota, *Kendō*, 84-5.

¹⁰⁸ Friday, *The Historical Foundations of Bushido*.

¹⁰⁹ Friday and Humitake, *Legacies of the Sword*, 6-7.

¹¹⁰ Guttmann and Thompson, *Japanese Sports*, 106.

of empire”, a link which has “caused problems since the war for those who wish to practice or study martial arts”.¹¹¹

The emphasis that historians have put on these changes of terminology and on the creation of modern *jūdō* and *kendō*, is, however, misleading for two reasons. On the one hand, it implies that traditional martial arts died out after the Meiji Restoration, and were superseded by institutionalised forms, like *jūdō* and *kendō*, which were reconstructions based on a merger of Western principles of physical education with Japanese traditional arts. The truth was rather that many classical martial art forms were still practised, either by schools, or by individuals who inherited martial arts’ techniques handed down within families and traditionally kept secret.

Secondly, by focusing on samurai ethics and supposed codes of honour, the debate sidelines the relationship of the martial arts to the broader concept of *dō* (and its variant *michi*) as “the spiritual path followed by adepts of a discipline, be it martial, religious or artistic”¹¹² which is a persistent theme in both Japanese and wider Asian culture. In general, it can be seen as a “moral, ethical and aesthetic” concept which guides “the seeker in the direction of serenity of mind, absolute equanimity”. *Dō* leads to,

the ‘light’, to the awakening of the self to its own true nature; a nature identical to that of the universe. The Way, therefore, is a constant search for self-perfection, implying the practice of numerous virtues, which must lead the individual to perfect union (*Ai*) with himself and his environment. The Do is in fact a sort of religious education whose sole aim is spiritual harmony with all beings, and mutual accord of self and the universal energy...¹¹³

¹¹¹ Cameron Hurst III, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan*, 12.

¹¹² Louis Frédéric, *A Dictionary of the Martial Arts*, trans. Paul Crompton (London: The Athlone Press, 1991), 26.

¹¹³ Ibid.

According to Kiyota, *-dō* has its origin in the Buddhist Sanskrit *mārga* (meaning the “path” to enlightenment), that is, in a spiritual concept independent of the martial arts, but to which it became linked as it did to many other Japanese arts such as *sadō* (way of the tea ceremony) and *kadō* (way of flower arrangement). The term refers, he says, to “the idea of formulating propositions, subjecting them to philosophical critique and then following a ‘path’ to realize them”.¹¹⁴ This view is shared by Yuasa who comments that the term *-dō* expressed “the sense of an ultimate goal in life, the *Tao*, or the path upon which a man journeys through his life”. He suggests that, in relation to the martial arts, it first meant “a technique for defeating an opponent” but later came to mean “a method of *overcoming oneself*”.¹¹⁵

Not only *-dō*, but also *bu* has an extended meaning. Jeffrey Dann observes that “the structure, meaning, and symbolism of bu is deeply fused with the native conceptions of Shinto thought” and that “bu is a sacred, primordial, and active force intimately associated with the origins of life and death, order and chaos, peace and war, and blood”.¹¹⁶ Friday similarly comments that *bu* is linked with the Shintō term *musubu* and, unlike its English counterpart, has constructive connotations. The concept of the “true martial art” (神武, *shinbu*) has, he says, a long history in Japanese thought. It embraced “physical and metaphysical as well as ethical ideas” and the condition obtaining when “all the essential principles of martial art are put into application simultaneously and in proper balance”.¹¹⁷

Whatever the content of a samurai code of conduct may have been, the fact remains that practice of the martial arts by Japan’s warrior class, whether in times of peace or war, has been closely bound up with Japanese religious

¹¹⁴ Kiyota, *Kendō*, 15.

¹¹⁵ Yuasa, "Science and Comparative Philosophy," 242.

¹¹⁶ Dann, "'Kendo' in Japanese Martial Culture", 262.

¹¹⁷ Friday and Humitake, *Legacies of the Sword*, 64.

thought. Maliszewski has given an overview of these religious influences,¹¹⁸ while Stuart McFarlane has pointed out that many contemporary practitioners draw on Buddhist, Confucian and Daoist “values and ethics”.¹¹⁹

It is a fundamental viewpoint of this study that the religious concept of *-dō* is different in ultimate intent from the ethical or social one, although ethics may be subsumed in it, just as *seishin* is subsumed under *reisei*. Both appear to have been part of Japanese martial practice for centuries and tension between them may have a long history, as illustrated by the following admonition given to warriors of the Kamakura-Muromachi period (twelfth to sixteenth centuries):

The relationship between lord and retainers is of an utmost importance. Regarding this, one should never waver, even when one may be admonished to follow some other way by Shakyamuni, Confucius or the Effulgent God (i.e. foremost ancestor of Emperors). If one goes astray in this he will be misled by banal doctrines of Shintoism or Buddhism. Let us be doomed to fall in hell, or let us be punished by gods. We have nothing else to do in mind but to serve our lord wholeheartedly!¹²⁰

Failure to differentiate between different types of ethical values (ethical with spiritual intent and ethical with socio-political intent) has, this research argues, led to the widespread assumption that all values in the martial arts have no real spiritual content in the sense of being integral to a search for ultimate meaning, particularly since the history of the twentieth century showed many martial arts' values to be linked to political and social aims.

¹¹⁸ Maliszewski, *Spiritual Dimensions of the Martial Arts*, 63-82.

¹¹⁹ Stuart McFarlane, "Mushin, Morals, and Martial Arts - a Discussion of Keenan's Yogacara Critique -," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 17, no. 4 (1990): 414.

¹²⁰ Nakamura Hajime, *A History of the Development of Japanese Thought from 592 to 1868* (Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai (Society for International Cultural Relations), 1967), 60.

Part Two

Main themes of Japanese spirituality

In this Part, some of the main themes of Japanese spirituality will be analysed in order, first, to provide overall context for points of comparison, in ensuing chapters, with the world view of *aikidō*. Second, the analysis will help to explain how, in contrast to Western views of the spiritual life which are linked to Cartesian thinking, the Japanese spiritual outlook entails a different attitude to the human body and its use as an instrument of spiritual practice.

The roots of Japanese spirituality are generally held to be in the indigenous *kami*-cults (which prefigured what later came to be called Shintō, a term whose meaning should be distinguished from that of the later State Shintō, an ideological creation of the Meiji era, constructed to provide the “religious foundation for the nation’s political structure”),¹²¹ and in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the predominant form of Buddhism in Japan, which entered the country from the sixth century onwards.¹²²

Chinese belief systems have also exerted significant influence. For example, although Daoism did not become an independent religion in Japan, it made a considerable contribution to Japanese folk religion,¹²³ Shintō, and the Japanese mountain religion, Shugendō.¹²⁴ It also influenced the development of

¹²¹ Kasahara Kazuo (ed.), *A History of Japanese Religion*, trans. Paul McCarthy and Gaynor Sekimori, First English ed. (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing, 2001), 535.

¹²² Buddhism officially arrived in Japan in 538 AD as a gift from King Song of Paekche. See Michiko Yusa, *Japanese Religions*, ed. Ninian Smart, *Religions of the World* (London: Routledge, 2002), 34.

¹²³ Ichiro Hori, ed., *Folk Religion in Japan Continuity and Change, Haskell Lectures on History of Religions New Series* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 14-15.

¹²⁴ Kasahara, *A History of Japanese Religion*, 150.

Chinese Ch'an, the antecedent of Japanese Zen,¹²⁵ and recent scholarship has pointed to a significant Daoist influence on Shintōist belief from an early date.¹²⁶

Confucianism, too, although it is not being treated here as a religious influence in *aikidō*, should be mentioned because of its role as the prime source of Japanese ethics, transmitted particularly through the medium of Neo-Confucianism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,¹²⁷ and in reinforcing ideals of self-cultivation in Japanese culture.

Along with Chinese thought came several concepts which have particular significance for *aikidō*, including the notion of *ki*, *yin-yang* and five-element theory and its further differentiation in the idea of harmonious cosmic permutation contained in the Chinese classic, the *I Ching*.¹²⁸

The syncretic tradition

Before examining the principal Japanese spiritual concepts which have emerged from these traditions, the outstanding syncretic feature of Japanese religion should be mentioned. Throughout its history, Japan has absorbed beliefs from the religious traditions mentioned above, by finding points of concordance and complementarity with them rather than difference. The most prominent example of such syncretism is the Shintō-Buddhist fusion which began in the mid-Heian period (794-1192), termed *shinbutsu shūgō* (meaning "overlapping of Shinto and Buddhism"),¹²⁹ another formulation of which was the *honji suijaku* theory by

¹²⁵ Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Enlightenment Origins and Meaning*, First English ed. (New York: Weatherhill, 1979), 28-34.

¹²⁶ See, for example, the comments on the work of Kuroda Toshio and Anna Seidel in Tim Barrett, "Shinto and Taoism in Early Japan," in *Shinto in History Ways of the Kami*, ed. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen, *Curzon Studies in Asian Religion* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 13.

¹²⁷ Ian Reader, Esben Andreasen, and Finn Stefánsson, *Japanese Religions: Past & Present* (Folkestone, Kent: Japan Library, 1993), 39.

¹²⁸ For the absorption of these ideas into Shinto, see Wai-ming Ng, "The I Ching in the Shinto Thought of Tokugawa Japan," *Philosophy East and West* 48, no. 4 (1998), 568-91.

¹²⁹ Yusa, *Japanese Religions*, 60.

which Shintō deities were interpreted in Buddhist terms. The Shintō-Buddhist relationship is only one example among many, however, and throughout this study there will often be occasion to point out other instances of cosanguinity.

The result of such willingness to find common ground is a “rich and complex” tradition, “encompassing within it both complementary and contradictory trends in religious thought and practice with an ease that may occasionally puzzle the Western observer”.¹³⁰ This is an important point of interest for this study because it provides an answer to those who might see *aikidō*’s fusion of ideas from different traditions as suggestive of artificially constructed meanings. On the contrary, the syncretic tradition explains how Ueshiba could integrate into *aikidō* practices from a number of religions, and is proof rather of his profound and diverse knowledge. It is with good reason that one of the first French *aikidōka* could say:

Aikido’s roots delve deep into a thousand-year-old past. Its principles can be found in India in the Vedantic texts and the teaching of the Buddha, in China in Daoism and the Ch’an sect of Buddhism, and finally in Japan, in Shinto, the Way of the Gods, in Budo, the Way of Chivalry and in Zen Buddhism which effected a form of synthesis from the sixteenth century.¹³¹

Although the various belief-systems in the Japanese melting-pot may appear to have divergent outlooks, there are many more areas of agreement than one might suppose. For example, while Shintō’s celebration of life through colourful ritual and festival appears to contrast sharply with the Buddhist emphasis on life as suffering,¹³² closer scrutiny shows many common features in their spiritual visions. Both, for instance, posit the interconnectedness of being,

¹³⁰ Paul Watt, *Shinto & Buddhism: Wellsprings of Japanese Spirituality* [Electronic article] (AskAsia, 1996), available from <http://www.askasia.org/frclasrm/readings/r000009.htm>.

¹³¹ Jean Gabriel Greslé, *Réflexions Sur L'aikido* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1995), 176.

¹³² Heinrich Dumoulin, *Understanding Buddhism Key Themes*, trans. Joseph S O’Leary (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1994), 17.

and both share a view of ultimate reality as non-dual and as having a cosmic dimension.

Interconnectedness of being

The concept of interconnectedness, of life as a single flow, is central to Japan's ancient *kami*-cults which many take to be the foundation of the Japanese spiritual vision.¹³³ This view is presented not in codified doctrines but in myths, narrated in the *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*), composed in 712, and the *Nihon Shoki* (*Chronicle of Japan*), composed around 620, which outline "on a metaphorical level, basic underlying concepts and views of life and the world and man's position in it".¹³⁴ Here reality is portrayed as *kannagara no michi*,¹³⁵ where *michi* means "something like the sacred blood or energy or spirit of the cosmos, and is the cosmic vitalizing force or energy",¹³⁶ hence indicating a "way" or "flow" of cosmic, or divine, life. Although there are multitudes of *kami* (deities), they have no individual form but are seen as the flow of the creative and expansive divine spirit which has taken "form as the world". Nature, then, is regarded as the "divine materialized, given form, made visible and tangible".¹³⁷

The idea of interconnectedness of being is also found in the Mahāyāna Buddhist interpretation of the doctrine of "dependent origination" (also known as "co-arising"), the idea that nothing has any independent existence.¹³⁸ The Mahāyāna view was elaborated by the two great Indian Buddhist schools, Madhyamaka (also known as Śūnyatā-vāda, the "Emptiness Teaching"), founded

¹³³ Robert E. Carter, *Encounter with Enlightenment: A Study of Japanese Ethics*, ed. Peter J. McCormick, *Suny Series in Modern Japanese Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 36.

¹³⁴ Ian Reader, "Shinto," in *Japanese Religions Past & Present*, ed. Ian Reader, Esben Andreasen, and Finn Steffánsson (Sandgate, Folkestone: Japan Library, 1993), 67.

¹³⁵ A Shintō expression used "to refer to the divine essence of the processes and the law of the natural order", see Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*.

¹³⁶ Carter, *Encounter with Enlightenment*.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

by Nāgārjuna (c. AD 150-250),¹³⁹ and the Yogācāra (meaning “Practice of Yoga”), founded by Asanga in the fourth or fifth century AD. Madhyamaka holds that since everything arises according to conditions there is nothing with a “true, substantially existent nature”, nothing that exists in an absolute way but only as a passing phenomenon.¹⁴⁰ Hence “Emptiness” (*Śūnyata* in Sanskrit) is not “some ultimate basis and substance of the world” but “the world is a web of fluxing, inter-dependent, baseless phenomena”.¹⁴¹ Yogācāra, meanwhile, explored the psychological consequences of this idea, emphasising the role of the mind in constructing the world.¹⁴²

Thus, “Emptiness” or “Void”, often misconstrued in the West as nihilistic, has positive connotations for it is “Empty” only insofar as it has no perduring substance. The idea of such a formless Absolute is also reinforced by Daoism, the third strand of spiritual influence in Japanese thought, which sees ultimate reality as continually manifesting permutations of *ki*, a concept which will be explored further below.

Non-duality, cosmic vision and the “path” to enlightenment

Implicit in the outlooks of these three principal traditions is the idea that the human person is part of the cosmic scheme rather than apart from it:

The self, like everything else, exists only in dependent interrelationship with all other things...caught up in this universal relationality, [it] extends beyond the empirical ego to the dimensions of the cosmos.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 95.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁴³ Dumoulin, *Understanding Buddhism*, 38.

The sense of separation is a delusion arising from an ego-centred vision, while the alternative to such alienation is a non-dual vision in which the distinction between subject and object is eliminated. In such a state, one no longer perceives oneself as separate from the whole of reality but merges with it. This is the direct perception of “reality as it is” which is held to have been the foundational experience of the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni, an experience which Buddhism “seeks to retrieve and clarify”¹⁴⁴ through doctrines (expounded in *sūtras* and *śāstras* or “commentaries”) on which spiritual practices are based. The concept of non-duality finds expression in East Asian culture in a multitude of metaphors, such as the harmony of Heaven and Earth (often referred to by Ueshiba), merging with the Dao, or attaining *nirvāṇa*.¹⁴⁵ It is a state synonymous with ultimate wisdom and compassion, the “state of enlightenment”, described thus:

The state of enlightenment is a non-dual state, a direct awareness of the interconnection that is discernable at the base of all things. At one’s deepest level of understanding, one is identified with others, and with everything, as clearly as one is identified with one’s own body and mind.¹⁴⁶

The interpreting of ultimate reality as non-dual has far-reaching implications for spiritual practice for it entails the view that transformation of human awareness from a dual to a non-dual state is possible. The various traditions offer different prescriptions for attaining such a unitive vision but, with only a few exceptions, generally share the view that attainment is by one’s own effort, a belief at the root of the idea of *-dō*, the “path” to enlightenment.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴⁵ *Nirvāṇa* is a Sanskrit term meaning “extinction”. It denotes a state of total non-attachment when all cravings are transcended and, hence, the round of birth and death ceases. It is also described as a state beyond mind and body. See Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 60-64.

¹⁴⁶ Carter, *Encounter with Enlightenment*, 29.

Knowledge by direct experience

As a result of this orientation, the pivotal idea of these religions becomes to change one's subjective attitude rather than the external circumstances in which one finds oneself.¹⁴⁷ In religious terms, this is the ideal of self-cultivation. Such a transformation requires more than following an ethical code (although ethics certainly may enter into it). It is an exploration into the "inner man", into those dimensions of being which have been almost "thought out of existence" in the modern West "in the name of an effort to think *everything* in 'materialist', or at least 'secular' terms," as Ian Watson observed in his reflections on the secular-materialist mind.¹⁴⁸ Yuasa describes it as a "science of subjective experience" dealing with the "whole of the mind", with aspects of being not well provided for in the Western embrace of logic which is based on "clear and distinct principles", "does not recognize the unknown mystery behind phenomena", and "attempts to eliminate from reality all that does not conform to forms of knowledge which it presupposes".¹⁴⁹

Traditional East Asian spirituality, then, seeks a direct apprehension of reality, a type of knowledge different from that based on ordinary experience and conscious thought, which it sees as finite. It is an understanding different from intellectual knowledge, "a mode of awareness untainted by the habits of conceptualization",¹⁵⁰ that is, knowledge obtained by direct cognition, rather than by reflection. Thus, in contrast to the West where religion is often creedal or

¹⁴⁷ Hideo Kishimoto, "Mahayana Buddhism and Japanese Thought," *Philosophy East & West* 4, no. 3 (1954): 217.

¹⁴⁸ Ian Watson, "The Anti-Wisdom of Modern Philosophy," *Studies in Comparative Religion* 6, no. 4 (1972): 222.

¹⁴⁹ Yuasa Yasuo, "Forward," in *Science and Comparative Philosophy, Introducing Yuasa Yasuo* ed. David Edward Shaner, Shigenori Nagatomo and Yuasa Yasuo (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), xiv-xv.

¹⁵⁰ David Edward Shaner, "The Japanese Experience of Nature: An Analysis of a Culturally Reinforced Attitude," in *Science and Comparative Philosophy Introducing Yuasa Yasuo*, ed. David Edward Shaner, Shigenori Nagatomo and Yuasa Yasuo (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 111.

doctrinal, Eastern religiosity puts value on experience, or “perhaps on the rituals that one performs in an attempt to bring on the spiritual experiences sought”.¹⁵¹

In all four Japanese spiritual traditions treated here, the obstacle to fusion with the Absolute is understood as egocentric vision. In Buddhism, the causes of such distorted vision are described as defilements which arises from sense perceptions and their interaction with karmic tendencies. In Shintō and Daoism the cause is discordance, a disharmony arising from thought and conduct emanating from egoic impulses. In Buddhism, “a religion based on the rational dismantling of illusions,”¹⁵² the causes of ego-centredness are clearly enunciated and the objective of spiritual practice defined as to break through the “conscious ego” in order to contact “genuine reality”.¹⁵³ In Shintō, to know the truth is to experience cosmic life directly, “not to stand separate from that which is divinely present, but to become filled with it”,¹⁵⁴ and the way to achieve this is through various methods of breaking down the sense of ego and encouraging spontaneous, heartfelt action which arises from a “peaceful, meditative, empathetically enfolding state of awareness”.¹⁵⁵

The body as instrument

Many practices have evolved throughout Asia to enable the adept to attain this differently oriented knowledge. As they all, however, aim at changing the basis of human perception, they often make use of the body in coordination with certain intentionalities of mind. Examples include the postures of Hatha Yoga, the breathing techniques (*prāṇāyāma*) of Rāja-Yoga, the *mudrās* (hand gestures) of Shingon, Daoist breathing and gymnastic exercises, and postures adopted in

¹⁵¹ Carter, *Encounter with Enlightenment*, 38.

¹⁵² Dumoulin, *Understanding Buddhism*, 47.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵⁴ Carter, *Encounter with Enlightenment*, 57.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

both walking and sitting meditation. The premise on which these uses of body movement and posture are based is neatly described by the Zen Buddhist monk (and *kyūdō* practitioner) Deshimaru Taisen (1914-1982)¹⁵⁶ thus,

The original nature of existence cannot be apprehended by our senses, our impressions. When we apprehend with our senses, the objective matter we apprehend is not real, not true substance; it is imagination.¹⁵⁷

To put it another way, the everyday view of “being an ego, separate from the world about us” is based on “ordinary bodily experience” in which the body is felt as ending at the surface of the skin and the world is felt as “out there”. Visual experiences, body sensations, and a body image are built up in the brain but, “Both science and mysticism agree that this experience of things is not absolute and true, but relative, arbitrary and illusory”.¹⁵⁸

Attaining a non-dual vision thus becomes to change the nature of perception, a possibility which can be envisaged, Yuasa argues, because of a mind-body paradigm different from that prevailing in the West where the dominant view derives from the Cartesian division of mind and body. In the latter, mind is implicitly superior (while flesh is weak); hence, “thought” is the basis of human behaviour,¹⁵⁹ and “the assumption is that training proceeds from mind to body”.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Deshimaru Taisen was a disciple of the Zen master Kodo Sawaki. He came to France in 1967, where he founded the Association Zen Internationale. He is particularly well known for his writings on Zen and the martial arts.

¹⁵⁷ Deshimaru Taisen, *Zen et arts martiaux*, ed. Marc de Smedt, *Collection 'Spiritualités Vivantes', Série Bouddhisme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1983), 30.

¹⁵⁸ Payne, *Martial Arts the Spiritual Dimension*, 45.

¹⁵⁹ Deshimaru, *Zen et arts martiaux*, 122.

¹⁶⁰ Yuasa Yasuo, *The Body, Self-Cultivation, and Ki Energy*, ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, trans. Shigenori Nagatomo and Monte S. Hull, *Suny Series, the Body in Culture, History, and Religion* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993), 26.

This is different from the Eastern view for:

mind and body are taken to be inseparable in the Eastern tradition, and training the body has been given positive meaning and value as a technical means of enhancing the spirit and personality. Here we can find a difference in the view of human being between the East and Western traditions which is not a mere linguistic problem.¹⁶¹

As a consequence of this attitude, Eastern spiritual practice often emphasises entering the mind from the body or form.¹⁶² The modality of the body is used to transform the mind, and the body becomes an instrument to identify oneself with “existence itself” rather than with discursive mind.¹⁶³ It is precisely such a reorientation that is claimed to be the function of *aikidō*,¹⁶⁴ which can reveal to the practitioner “the forgotten, undeveloped potential offered by his body, then his mind, then the two united, that is to say one’s being in its unity”.¹⁶⁵

That unity of mind and body was an important element of Ueshiba’s approach to spirituality is clear from this remark:

This world has thus far been the material world of the physical body (*haku*), but from now forward the spirit (*kon*) and body must become one. The physical world and the spiritual world need to be equally balanced.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁶² Ibid., 26.

¹⁶³ The contrast between the Western identification of “self with mind” expressed in Descartes’ famous sentence [cogito ergo sum – I think, therefore I am] and the Eastern view of identification with the whole of life is from Fritjof Capra, quoted in Gleason, *The Spiritual Foundations of Aikido*, 29.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Protin, *Aikido un art martial*, 37.

¹⁶⁶ Ueshiba Morihei 植芝 盛平, 武産合気 四 (“Takemusu aiki 4”). In 武産合気 (*Takemusu aiki*), ed. Takahashi Hideo 高橋 英雄 (著). (Tokyo: Byakkō Shinkōkai, 1986), 75.

Transformation through affirmation

Although Shintō, Buddhism and Daoism posit different methods for transforming awareness, their approaches have at least two aspects in common. First is an affirmative outlook towards the human personality. So, while Buddhism elsewhere takes the negative approach to the “rational dismantling of illusions”,¹⁶⁷ in Japan, under the influence of Shintō’s life-affirming stance, its approach takes the form of *reconstruction*:

Buddhism in Japan shows radical differences from such [Indian] life-negating Buddhism...It also aims at remoulding man’s mind. But there is an important shift on the purpose of such remoulding. It does not try to exterminate man’s basic desires, but it tries to straighten the desire structure of man.¹⁶⁸

This affirmative outlook is manifest in the emphasis in Japanese Buddhism on uncovering the inherently enlightened Buddha-nature, and in the Shintō focus on development of the heart/mind (*kokoro*), in order to let the divine shine through.¹⁶⁹

The spiritual path is thus directed toward revealing an original pristine purity. Hence, the concept of purification is highly prized, as are intuition and spontaneity as manifestations of the untainted state. Intuition has the quality of being “immediate, receptive and passive”; because it has no logical connection with any preceding thought, it is non-egoic and can follow its own creative impulse.¹⁷⁰ Spontaneity here does not mean erratic conduct, but action or feeling which arises from the foundational ground of being when the discursive mind no

¹⁶⁷ Dumoulin, *Understanding Buddhism*, 47.

¹⁶⁸ A Japanese authority quoted by Jean Herbert, *Shinto at the Fountain-Head of Japan* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), 45.

¹⁶⁹ Carter, *Encounter with Enlightenment*, 56.

¹⁷⁰ J. D. Cauhépé and A. Kuang, *Les Arts martiaux intériorisés ou l'aikido de la sagesse* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1984), 243.

longer obstructs its passage. It contrasts with action emanating from a “willful ego” which simply serves to “increasingly dualize us, i.e. separates us from others, and from the natural environment”.¹⁷¹

The divine in the phenomenal

The second shared premise is that of the permeation of the divine in the world of the material:

On the Asian continent, the word for enlightenment meant the ultimate comprehension of what is beyond the phenomenal world, whereas in Japan the same word was brought down to refer to understanding things within the phenomenal world.¹⁷²

The philosophical rationale for this connection is provided in Buddhism by the Mahāyāna doctrine of the equation of *nirvāna* and *samsāra*.¹⁷³ In Mahāyāna, the term *śūnyatā*, which denotes that there is “no perduring substantial self”¹⁷⁴ represents the “ultimate unsubstantiality of all things”, the “true nature of things” to which *nirvāna* is the awakening.¹⁷⁵ It thus differs from the early Buddhist view (represented today by the Theravāda), which contrasts *nirvāna* with *samsāra*, and sees the goal of spiritual practice as being to overcome the world by freeing oneself from “attachment and desire” and the “evils of greed, hatred, and delusion”.¹⁷⁶ Because Mahāyāna, however, sees *nirvāna* and *samsāra* as ultimately identical, it holds that reality can be perceived within the phenomenal world; the Mahāyāna path is thus not to overcome the world but to perceive its true nature, an understanding of relevance for *aikidō*.

¹⁷¹ Carter, *Encounter with Enlightenment*, 22.

¹⁷² Nakamura Hajime, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India-China-Tibet-Japan*, 1997 revised ed. (London: Kegan Paul International, 1964), 351.

¹⁷³ *Samsāra* is a Sanskrit term meaning “wandering on”, thus indicating the cycle of rebirths. See Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 32.

¹⁷⁴ George Rupp, “The Relationship between Nirvaana and Samsaara: An Essay on the Evolution of Buddhist Ethics,” *Philosophy East and West* 21 (1980): 60.

¹⁷⁵ Daniel Palmer, “Masao Abe, Zen Buddhism and Social Ethics,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics online* 4 (1997): 122.

In Shintō the permeation of the divine in the phenomenal takes the form of a sense of the sacred imbued in natural objects, places and people, and inducing “reverence, respect and the intuition that we are part of this subtle fabric, not its exploiter”.¹⁷⁷

The concept of *ki*

A concordant understanding of life as a single flow interpenetrating all things is found in the concept of *ki*, an ancient idea fundamental to Chinese thought and which has permeated Japanese culture. In Sino-Japanese vocabularies, the term *ki*, which has profound metaphysical implications, is used in many everyday expressions. It is often translated in other languages as the equivalent of “breath”, “energy” or “life-force”, renderings which, although they may indicate aspects of *ki*, fail to convey the manifold connotations of this term in Chinese and Japanese.¹⁷⁸

In the course of its long history, the concept of *ki* has acquired many associated meanings whose complexity is suggested here:

Ki is an energy which is inherently linked with life and consciousness, and which can produce direct effects on physical energies and matter. Indeed, the action of *ki* is often associated with electrical and magnetic effects, which seem to be side-effects rather than the main active principles. *Ki* can be directed by conscious intention. *Ki* moves like smoke, like water; it flows, has coherence and pattern, yet is unfixed and formless.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Rupp, "The Relationship between Nirvaana and Samsaara," 57-58.

¹⁷⁷ Carmen Blacker, *Shinto and the Sacred Dimensions of Nature* [electronic article] (International Shinto Foundation, [accessed on 21 June 2002]), available from <http://shinto.org/dr.carmen-e.html>.

¹⁷⁸ See comments on the dangers of “the acceptance of meanings and understandings [of *ki*] as equivalent which simply are not” in Yu Huan Zhang and Ken Rose, *A Brief History of Qi* (Brooklyn, Mass.: Paradigm Publications, 2001), 21.

¹⁷⁹ Payne, *Martial Arts the Spiritual Dimension*, 44.

Despite their diversity, all these meanings have in common a reflection of the Sino-Japanese concept of reality, rather than the prevailing Western one which, as noted, separates mind and matter.

As is evident, the name *ai-ki-dō* indicates that the concept of *ki* is fundamental to this art. Nevertheless, many *aikidō* practitioners, both Western and Japanese, find the concept confusing or deny it, as was noted in a recent survey of attitudes to *ki* of contemporary *aikidō* teachers.¹⁸⁰ This may be because the term is rooted in an understanding of universal reality which differs substantially from the prevailing Western one, or because of the difficulty of trying to grasp with the intellectual mind a meaning which can only be apprehended by direct experience. In Yuasa's opinion, it is a concept which cannot be understood in terms of the Cartesian mind-matter dichotomy, for it is "both psychological and physiological: its substance lies in the region of the psychologically unconscious and the physiologically invisible".¹⁸¹ Keisetsu Yoshimaru's study provides confirmation of the notion that, "subjective *ki* changes objective *ki*",¹⁸² which explains why, in ancient Chinese tradition, *ki* could be thoroughly understood only through one's own experience.¹⁸³ Despite confusion among martial arts' practitioners concerning the concept of *ki*, it appears to have been integral to martial arts' practice for a long time, and is

¹⁸⁰ Minhuy Ho, *The Concept of Ki in Aikido - a Literature Survey* [electronic article] (The Aikido FAQ, 2002[accessed on 5 March 2002]), available from <http://www.aikidofaq.com/philosophy/index.html>.

¹⁸¹ Yuasa, *The Body, Self-Cultivation, and Ki Energy*, 116.

¹⁸² Keisetsu Yoshimaru 吉丸慶雪, 発勁の科学 : 統合気・発勁の秘密を解く (*Hakkei no kagaku : zoku aiki hakkei no himitsu o toku*). Tokyo : Besuborumagajin Sha, 1998, 29.

¹⁸³ Zhang and Rose, *A Brief History of Qi*, 22.

reported to have been applied in techniques of physical development in the Tokugawa period.¹⁸⁴

In order to situate its relevance for *aikidō* as spiritual practice, some words must be said about the metaphysics of *ki*. In ancient Chinese thought, original *ki* (“*yuan qi*”) is described as “the material that permeates everything”, the source of all the transformations of life and nature and the basis of the existence of the entire world. It is an immense, all-embracing concept, not only, as often implied in Western writings, a life-force within matter, but also the matter itself, “covering all of heaven and earth, mankind, nature, the four seasons, emptiness and reality, animals, plants, water and fire, spirits and gods”.¹⁸⁵ The whole of the human person is perceived as constructed of invisible *ki* which manifests as the physical body and as mind. For this reason, in Chinese culture, descriptors are attached to the term *ki* to designate its different manifestations.¹⁸⁶

Ki, then, is an explanation of universal reality as self-organising flux, a concept sufficiently different from the Western view of a creator God, it can be mentioned in passing, to have excited concern among some Christian scholars over the impact of the idea on Christians who practise martial arts.¹⁸⁷ In this understanding of the nature of reality, spirituality becomes oriented towards apprehension of *ki* and its permutations, towards apprehending oneself ever more subtly as a field of *ki* until awareness of “personal” flux becomes awareness of cosmic flux and the boundary between the human person and the cosmos is dissolved.

¹⁸⁴ Kouzo Kaku, *The Mysterious Power of Ki - the Force Within*, trans. Roger Machin and Mami Nakamura (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2000), 35.

¹⁸⁵ Zhang and Rose, *A Brief History of Qi*, vi-vii.

¹⁸⁶ Examples from Chinese medicine include *jing qi* (essence), *shen qi* (spirit), *xue qi* (blood), *qi xue* (*qi* and blood), *zhao qi* (vitality). See Zhang and Rose, *A Brief History of Qi*, 6.

Yuasa adds that by learning to detect the flow of *ki* in him/herself and in others, the martial artist faces the “surrounding external environment, the world of matter”. Unifying the mind with *ki* thus means that “the mind comes to feel the flow of *ki* between the inner world (mind) and the outer world (matter).”¹⁸⁸

Hence, the concept of “*aiki*” comes to imply dissolving the boundary between person and cosmos:

Aikido is a martial art which aims at the cultivation of this *ki*. The *aiki* in aikido refers to harmonizing one’s *ki* or vital energy not only with a partner, but with all living beings of the universe. This harmony enables one to realize that the flow of an individual’s *ki* exists as part of the flow of the *ki* of the universe.¹⁸⁹

From this brief survey, it can be seen that in order for *aikidō* to fit the criteria of spirituality stipulated in this study, it must be shown to be a technique for changing one’s state of perception by removing the factors of ego, sensing life as a single flow and apprehending immateriality and interconnection, or a composite practice of all of these. The next chapter will establish the grounds for believing that Ueshiba saw *aikidō* as thus oriented.

¹⁸⁷ Erwin de Castro, B. J. Oropeza, and Ron Rhodes, *Enter the Dragon? Wrestling with the Martial Arts Phenomenon* [Electronic article] (Reasoning from the Scriptures Ministries, 2002 [accessed on 23 June 2002]), available from <http://home.earthlink.net/~ronrhodes/Martial2.html>.

¹⁸⁸ Yuasa, *The Body, Self-Cultivation, and Ki Energy*, xix.

¹⁸⁹ Kamata Shigeo 鎌田茂雄, and Shimizu Kenji 清水健二. 禪と合気道 (*Zen to aikidō*). (Kyoto-shi : Jinbun Shoin, 1984), 8.

Chapter Two: Ueshiba Morihei's life and thought

In most of the Western literature about *aikidō*, Ueshiba Morihei (see Appendix 2, Figure 1, page 168) has been presented mainly as a consummate martial artist rather than a spiritual seeker. With a few notable exceptions, most works on *aikidō* make limited reference to Ueshiba's spiritual beliefs and practices. There is an undoubted perception that *aikidō* owes most to its martial arts' heritage and a tendency to discount the influence on it of various Japanese religious traditions. The image of Ueshiba thus projected may result partly from the prominence that the Japanese government was keen to give its martial arts, as symbols of a contribution to world culture, after World War II. It may also result from the lack of a contextualised biography and from the fact that Ueshiba's writings and lectures are fragmentary and have not been gathered together in a readily available volume. The Japanese sources of information on Ueshiba are scattered and few of the primary sources have been translated into Western languages.¹⁹⁰

This failure to put Ueshiba's performance and experiences into the context of Japanese spiritual traditions, however, has led scholars such as Guttmann and Thompson to treat accounts of his martial arts' performance with disbelief.¹⁹¹ Such scepticism is not confined to scholars; some martial artists, both during Ueshiba's lifetime and in the present, have also doubted his achievement. Tomiki Kenji, for instance, attributed Ueshiba's skill to "muscular training which is part of modern physical education [sic]. It's called isometrics".¹⁹² Others, however, consider that Ueshiba's ability to throw his attackers with "what appears to be an ineffectual wave of the hand or a light, guiding touch to the attacker's body" were "eloquent testimony to his

¹⁹⁰ Stanley Pranin, "Editorial," *Aiki News*, no. 6 (September 1974): 2.

¹⁹¹ Guttmann and Thompson, *Japanese Sports*, 149.

¹⁹² Pranin (ed.), *Aikido Masters*, 58.

extraordinary spiritual and martial development”¹⁹³ (see Appendix 2, Figure 6, page 168 for demonstration of a technique without touching).

In order to prepare the ground for showing, in ensuing chapters, how various Japanese spiritual practices and beliefs informed *aikidō*, this Chapter aims to demonstrate, first, that Ueshiba was above all a spiritual seeker, a man powerfully motivated since youth to seek ultimate solutions to life, who subjected himself to rigorous asceticism and immersed himself in the practices of several spiritual disciplines. Second, it will indicate that this intent oriented the formulation of *aikidō*.

Ueshiba Morihei – some impressions

Because the main biography of Ueshiba in English has been criticised for brevity and perpetuating some fallacies about Ueshiba’s life,¹⁹⁴ this author has relied mostly on material contained in many interviews and other first-hand accounts by those who knew Ueshiba, and on the biography of Ueshiba by his son, Kisshōmaru. Through scrutiny of these sources, a picture emerged of a man engaged in a quest for the “true martial art” (真の武, *shin no bu*)¹⁹⁵ which eventually led him to insights into reality more usually associated with the outcome of religious practice.

The prominent religious figure Goi Masahisa (1916-80),¹⁹⁶ founder of the Japanese religious organisation, the Byakkō Shin Kōkai, attributed Ueshiba’s

¹⁹³ Christopher Watson, "Spiritual Versus Martial Aikido Explanation and Reconciliation," *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* 5, no. 1 (1996): 52.

¹⁹⁴ See Stanley Pranin’s critique of John Stevens’ *Abundant Peace the Biography of Morihei Ueshiba Founder of Aikido* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1987) in Stanley Pranin, *Editorial: On John Stevens’ Biography of Morihei Ueshiba* [Electronic article] (*Aikido Journal* online, republished from *Aiki News* no. 77 (April 1988), [accessed on 2003]), available from <http://www.aikidojournal.com/new/article.asp?ArticleID=443>.

¹⁹⁵ Ueshiba referred often to this term which he wrote with the characters 真の武. As Friday points out (see page 30 above), this is an alternative rendering of *shinbu* (神武).

¹⁹⁶ According to Pranin, Goi Masahisa was a close friend of Ueshiba (see Pranin (ed.), *Aikido Masters*, 160, n.11).

apparently astonishing *aikidō* performance to spiritual insight rather than technical prowess, and described Ueshiba as having “achieved Oneness with God [*kami*] through the Way of the martial arts”.¹⁹⁷ Although the evidence is scattered, there appear to have been many *aikidōka* who held similar views, such as Kamada Hisao,¹⁹⁸ who considered that Ueshiba’s teachings were essentially about spirituality and that techniques were only a “means”,¹⁹⁹ or Yonekawa Shigemi, who believed that Ueshiba had a “mysterious” knowledge.²⁰⁰ Sunadomari Kanshū observed that if Ueshiba had not possessed a spiritual goal, *aikidō* would have become “merely a form of jujutsu”.²⁰¹

Despite the transformation that *aikidō* has undergone since it spread outside Japan, and the acknowledged fact that no *aikidō* practitioner or teacher has yet attained the same insights as its founder,²⁰² many practitioners maintain that Ueshiba’s creation has changed their perspectives on life and challenged them to re-evaluate their assumptions about the nature of being.²⁰³ Robert Nadeau, an American *aikidōka*, for instance, holds that Ueshiba’s martial arts’ performance was visible evidence that “there were in existence other dimensions

¹⁹⁷ “Thoughts of Masahisa Goi: ‘Man and the True Way of Living’”, *Aikido Journal*, no. 115 (1998): 13-14. In the original Japanese, Goi would have used the word “*Kami*” here, as suggested by the title of his well-known book, *Kami to Ningen (God and Man)*.

¹⁹⁸ A member of a family of Ōmoto believers, Kamada Hisao trained with Ueshiba from 1929, becoming an instructor with the Budō Sen’yōkai in 1932 until he joined the Imperial Japanese Army in 1938. See Pranin (ed.), *Aikido Masters*, 63.

¹⁹⁹ Pranin (ed.), *Aikido Masters*, 68.

²⁰⁰ Pranin (ed.), *Aikido Masters*, 143-44. Yonekawa Shigemi started training with Ueshiba in 1932 after having participated in a Budō Sen’yōkai seminar.

²⁰¹ Sunadomari Kanshū, “Interview with Kanshu Sunadomari,” *Aiki News*, no. 64 (November 1984): 9-10.

²⁰² See comments about the uniqueness of Ueshiba’s performance in Shibata Minoru, *A Dilemma Deferred: An Identity Denied and Dismissed* [Electronic article] (*Aikido Journal*, 2002[accessed on 2002]), available from <http://www.aikidojournal.com/new/article.asp?ArticleID=263>.

²⁰³ André Protin observes that *aikidō* training requires practitioners constantly to readjust their values and sometimes change them completely. See Protin, *Aikido un art martial*, 96.

of consciousness”.²⁰⁴ Others, too, have asserted that *aikidō* provides them with a method of ongoing spiritual practice.²⁰⁵ In this regard, Protin comments:

aikidō surprises us because it brings into play a different way of thinking, a different way of living and especially because it presupposes an ontological position concerning the human person different from the one with which we are imbued.²⁰⁶

Before proceeding to review the events of Ueshiba’s life, it should be mentioned that Ueshiba was a prominent figure in Japan’s martial arts’ circles from the 1930s, when his art took distinctive shape, until his death in 1969. His martial arts’ skill was famed and recorded in thousands of photographs, several monochrome films, newspaper articles and the testimonies of those who trained with him (see Appendix 1, page 167, for a list of Ueshiba’s leading students). Because of its value as a neat summation of his achievement, the following description of Ueshiba’s performance by Stanley Pranin, *aikidō* practitioner, editor of *Aiki News* and historian of *aikidō*, is given in full:

what is most patently obvious is that a seemingly impotent little old man was able to control and direct the energy of his powerful young attackers. And as if this were not remarkable enough, he succeeded in exercising his mastery without inflicting injury on his opponent. His techniques were round and flowing and his philosophy imbued with love. His debt to the martial figures who preceded him was unquestionable and yet his art contained something fundamentally new. It offered a glimmer of a new possibility – a new solution to the “zero-sum” game played by man from time immemorial. A refusal to do battle while emerging unscathed from the battlefield... O-Sensei [Ueshiba] was a man of passion who achieved a state of serenity. There was an aura of mystery enveloping his art – something perceived as unattainable

²⁰⁴ Robert Nadeau, “Interview with Bruce Klickstein, Bob Nadeau and Frank Doran (1),” *Aiki News*, no. 39 (August 1981): 6. Nadeau began practising *aikidō* in Japan in the late 1950s.

²⁰⁵ See, for example, comments about how *aikidō* principles have affected their lives in George Leonard, *The Way of Aikido Life Lessons from an American Sensei* (New York: Dutton, 1999) and Stan Wrobel, *Aikido for Self Discovery: Blueprint for an Enlightened Life* (St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn Publications, 2001).

²⁰⁶ Protin, *Aikido un art martial*, 13.

to those who view him as a god while offering great promise for
those who view him as a man.²⁰⁷

Ueshiba's life: a brief sketch

Ueshiba was born in 1883, fifteen years after the restoration of the emperor in 1868 which ended 264 years of rule by the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1867) during which Japan had remained largely isolated from the outside world. It was a time of immense upheaval when Japan was "being transformed from a feudal society into an industrialised one, heavily influenced by the West".²⁰⁸ Every aspect of life was in transition, as continual debate raged about what were the best courses for Japan to pursue in order to match Western industrialised society.

His life coincided with an era of exceptional social ferment, when old assumptions about Japanese values were being strongly questioned and "a range of 'ideologues'...produced multiple, contending views of the late Meiji world".²⁰⁹ During his lifetime, milestones in Japan's history included victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 which led to the colonisation of Taiwan, victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-5, the 1929 Great Depression, the rise of militarism in the 1930s, the Pacific War (1941-45), followed by the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, Japan's defeat, the allied occupation and eventual regaining of autonomy in 1952.

Information about Ueshiba's early years is sparse,²¹⁰ but it is known that he was born in the coastal town of Tanabe, in Kii Province (now known as

²⁰⁷ Stanley Pranin, "Editorial, O-Sensei: Concretizing the Myth," *Aiki News*, no. 55 (July 1983): 2 and 15.

²⁰⁸ Ian Reader, "Meeting Japanese Culture: Introduction," in *Japanese Religions Past & Present*, ed. Ian Reader, Esben Andreasen, and Finn Stefnsson (Sandgate, Folkestone: Japan Library, 1993), 11.

²⁰⁹ Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period*, Paperback ed., *Studies of the East Asian Institute, Columbia University* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 15.

²¹⁰ For information on Ueshiba's early life see Stanley Pranin, *Morihei in Tanabe* [Electronic article] (Aikido Journal online, 2002[accessed on 2002]), available from http://www.aikidojournal.com/articles/_pages/00_print.asp?ArticleID=1152.

Wakayama Prefecture)²¹¹ in a south-central peninsula of the Japanese main island as the son of a prosperous landowner whose wealth, from fishing and timber trades, enabled Ueshiba in later life to pursue his interest in martial arts.²¹² As his father was a town councillor at a time of vigorous debate at all levels of society, it is likely that Ueshiba was exposed to issues of political and social concern from a young age. After leaving school and a brief spell working for relatives in Tokyo in 1903, in the wave of patriotism that accompanied the onset of the Russo-Japanese War he enlisted in a local regiment²¹³ and thereafter remained in the army for about three years.²¹⁴ In 1905 his army unit was sent to the Manchurian front, the only occasion on which he saw active service.

After the war ended, Ueshiba turned down a military career and returned to Tanabe.²¹⁵ According to Kisshōmaru, this was a troubled period of Ueshiba's life when he was prone to erratic behaviour, sometimes praying all day in seclusion or going into the mountains and fasting.²¹⁶ Although this might seem odd behaviour to the Western reader, it was not particularly unusual in Japan where mountain asceticism has a long history. In addition, the Kumano region to the east of Ueshiba's homeland was famous as a centre of Shugendō.²¹⁷

As unemployment became widespread in rural areas, the government launched initiatives to create employment and colonise undeveloped areas such as the northern island of Hokkaido. Participating in this national venture, Ueshiba in 1912 led a group of about ninety settlers from his home town to

²¹¹ See entry on Ueshiba Morihei in Pranin (ed.), *The Aiki News Encyclopedia of Aikido*, 128.

²¹² Pranin, *Aikido Masters*, 3. See also Pranin, *Morihei in Tanabe*.

²¹³ Laszlo Abel, "The martial arts background of Morihei Ueshiba," *Aiki News*, no. 73 (December 1986):48.

²¹⁴ Pranin, *Morihei in Tanabe*.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Ueshiba, *Aikido Kaiso Ueshiba Morihei Den*, 72.

²¹⁷ The mountain ascetics (*yamabushi*) cult. See Yusa, *Japanese Religions*, 43-46. For information on Shugendō practices see Paul L. Swanson, "Shugendo and the Yoshino-Kumano Pilgrimage: An Example of Mountain Pilgrimage," *Monumenta Nipponica* 36, no. 1 (1981).

pioneer a settlement in Aza-Shirataki village, Mombetsu County, Hokkaido. It was while in Hokkaido that, in 1915, Ueshiba encountered Takeda Sokaku (1860-1943),²¹⁸ a traditional martial arts' practitioner of some fame, who, according to one account, was employed by the municipal court in Hakodate City to protect court officials.²¹⁹ Takeda was an itinerant teacher of Daito-ryū jūjutsu (later called Daito-ryū aiki jūjutsu, the term *aiki* being added at Takeda's request when he visited Ueshiba's *dōjō* in Ayabe),²²⁰ a form of *jūjutsu* martial art.²²¹ He did not establish any *dōjō* (training halls), but is estimated to have taught about 30,000 students during his lifetime.²²² Ueshiba, who had already acquired considerable martial arts' knowledge, is said to have been fascinated with Takeda's technique and became his student. This encounter has since been regarded as one of the defining events of Ueshiba's life.

A second pivotal event occurred in 1919 when, on returning to Tanabe on hearing of his father's illness, Ueshiba made a detour to visit a local spiritual teacher, Deguchi Onisaburō (1871-1948), co-founder of the Ōmoto religion, one of Japan's burgeoning new religions. Impressed with Onisaburō's teaching, in 1920, Ueshiba moved his family to the Ōmoto headquarters at Ayabe where he engaged for seven years "in a life of farming, training, and ascetic practices"²²³ (see photo of Ayabe today in Appendix 2, Figure 8, page Appendix 2). Onisaburō had a profound influence on Ueshiba who, by numerous accounts,

²¹⁸ Takeda was proficient in several classical martial arts in addition to Daito-ryū. These included the swordsmanship of the Ono-ha Ittō Ryū and the Jikishin Kage-Ryū and spearmanship of the Hōzōin Ryū; see Laszlo Abel, "The martial arts background of Morihei Ueshiba (2)," *Aiki News*, no. 74 (April 1987): 58.

²¹⁹ Takeda Tokimune, "Sokaku Takeda Bodyguard in Hokkaido," *Aiki News*, no. 70 (March 1986): 30.

²²⁰ Stanley A. Pranin (ed.), *Daito-Ryu Aikijujutsu Conversations with Daito-Ryu Masters* (Tokyo: Aiki News, 1996), 27.

²²¹ For a detailed history of Daito-ryū see Takeda Tokimune, "History of Daito-Ryu," *Aiki News*, no. 67 (May 1985): 12-15.

²²² Takeda Tokimune, "Tokimune Takeda Conversation with the Son of Sokaku Takeda (1)," *Aiki News*, no. 71 (June 1986): 21.

²²³ Pranin (ed.), *Aikido Masters*, 8.

venerated him as his spiritual master “to the point of adulation”.²²⁴ A close bond developed between them and Ueshiba was one of a small group who accompanied Onisaburō on a shortlived pioneering expedition in February 1924 to found a Utopian community in Mongolia.²²⁵

Onisaburō is credited with having encouraged Ueshiba to pursue the martial arts as spiritual practice, and it was at Ayabe that he began to create his own distinctive martial art style, known initially as “Ueshiba-ryū”. Kisshōmaru describes the Ayabe *dōjō* as a “shugyo [ascetic training] dojo mainly for the founder’s personal training”,²²⁶ indicating that Ueshiba was at this stage interested in training mainly for his own development. Nevertheless, the *dōjō* gradually became more well known within Ōmoto and several hundred students are said to have been enrolled there,²²⁷ including members of the military.

This period marks the start of Ueshiba’s association with military and naval personnel with whom he began to gain fame largely through the auspices of Admiral Takeshita Isamu²²⁸ who became an enthusiastic supporter of Ueshiba. Takeshita trained with Ueshiba for many years and recorded extensive notes on his training sessions. His influence resulted in many members of the military, government and business elite becoming devotees of Ueshiba’s style. He also arranged for Ueshiba to give a demonstration at the Imperial Palace

²²⁴ Akazawa Zenzaburō, “Interview with Zenzaburo Akazawa,” *Aiki News*, no. 48 (May 1982): 4.

²²⁵ This episode is described in Kyotaro Deguchi, *The Great Onisaburo Deguchi*, trans. Charles Rowe (Tokyo: Aiki News, 1998), 126-34.

²²⁶ Pranin (ed.), *Aikido Masters*, 290.

²²⁷ Article in an unnamed Japanese newspaper published in 1966, republished in *Aiki News*, vol. II, no. 5 (June 1975): 4.

²²⁸ As a young man Takeshita (1869-1949) was a naval officer in the diplomat corps. Fluent in English he accompanied Crown Prince Hirohito to Europe in 1919 as an interpreter. He was also a friend of US President Theodore Roosevelt
[<http://www.aikidojournal.com/ubb/Forum9/HTML/000605.html>]

Saineikan *dōjō* in 1941,²²⁹ and was the first president of the Kobukai Foundation.²³⁰

At Takeshita's invitation (but with the approval of Deguchi), Ueshiba went to Tokyo in 1927 where lodgings and *dōjō* were found for him in the homes of the military elite.²³¹ Initially there were only a few students, comprising members of the nobility, military and other famous figures.²³² In the 1930s, however, when his art became known as *aiki-budō*, Ueshiba's fame spread widely in the *budō* world and he was extremely active teaching at a new large permanent *dōjō*, the Kobukan, opened in Tokyo in April 1931. He also taught in the private *dōjō* of businesses, banks and newspapers.

Ueshiba continued to teach in Tokyo until World War II when he took a decision to move to the countryside at Iwama in order to develop his idea of *budō* as a an art of peace. Some of his students thought that this idea had been in gestation for a long time but that the War constituted a "turning-point"²³³ and that it was at Iwama after the War, in 1950-51, that his thought matured.²³⁴ This was a time of immense soul-searching which resulted in "a profound and permanent change in his thinking".²³⁵ Kisshōmaru describes his father as having three objectives in moving to Iwama: to construct an Aiki shrine, create an

²²⁹ This demonstration is described by Shioda Gōzō in "Interview with Gozo Shioda," *Aiki News*, no. 53 (March 1983): 4-6.

²³⁰ The incorporated name of the Kobukan *dōjō*. The Kobukai was established in 1941, temporarily suspended after World War II then re-established as the Aikikai Foundation in 1948 (see Ueshiba Kisshōmaru, "Interview with Doshu Kisshomaru Ueshiba (2)," *Aiki News*, no. 31 (September 1978): 5.

²³¹ Ueshiba, *Aikido Kaiso Ueshiba Morihei Den*, 190-91.

²³² Ueshiba Kisshōmaru, "Interview with Doshu (1)," *Aiki News*, no. 56 (July 1983): 4.

²³³ Sunadomari Kanshū, "Interview with Kanshu Sunadomari (2)," *Aiki News* no. 65 (December 1984):5.

²³⁴ Article in unnamed Japanese newspaper published in 1966, translated for *Aiki News*, no. 6 (September 1974): 3.

²³⁵ Stanley Pranin, Editorial "Aikido and Traditional Japanese Martial Arts" in *Aiki News*, no. 29 (April 1978): 6.

outdoor *dōjō* and “live his ideal of budo and farming”. Together these three formed the Aiki-En (Aiki farm) project.²³⁶

Ueshiba continued to live and train at Iwama for the rest of his life, but travelled frequently to Tokyo and other centres to teach. Responsibility for the Tokyo headquarters *dōjō*, however, was largely in the hands of his son and other leading practitioners.

Ueshiba and the spiritual legacy of the martial arts

Ueshiba practised many martial arts’ styles and continued to do so throughout his life, even after his discovery of Daito-ryū jūjutsu. For him, the search for the true martial art was a lifelong quest in the tradition of *musha shugyō*.²³⁷

The sparsity of biographical material and confusion of names of martial arts’ schools and styles makes it difficult to be precise about the provenance of Ueshiba’s martial arts’ knowledge. It is usually considered, however, to have started at the turn of the century, during his stay in Tokyo, with his introduction to a traditional *jūjutsu* style, Tenshin Shin’yo-ryū,²³⁸ under Tozawa Tokusaburo (1848-1912).²³⁹ He is also said to have studied other *jūjutsu* styles. While based with his regiment in Osaka in 1903, he trained (possibly under the famous teacher Nakai Masakatsu) in Yagyū Shingan-ryū, a style which included both *jūjutsu* and weapons’ arts,²⁴⁰ and possibly the spear arts of the Hōzōin-ryū and

²³⁶ Ueshiba Kisshōmaru, *Aikido Kaiso Ueshiba Morihei Den*, 257.

²³⁷ Ibid., 93. See also the description of *musha shugyō* as a quest “approached with the idea of achieving personal fulfillment through ascetic practices like going without food or sleep and withstanding cold” which became popular in the sixteenth century (Cameron Hurst III, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan*, 40-41).

²³⁸ According to the classical Japanese martial arts’ historian Laszlo Abel, this was a “popular late Edo period (1603-1868) *jūjutsu* tradition” also called Tenshin Ryū and Iso Ryū (see *Aiki News*, no. 73 (December 1986): 48).

²³⁹ Ueshiba Morihei and Ueshiba Kisshōmaru, “An Interview with O-Sensei and Kisshomaru Ueshiba Part I,” *Aiki News*, no.18 (1976): 7 and Pranin, *Morihei in Tanabe*.

²⁴⁰ Ueshiba’s study of this classical martial art is confirmed by his nephew, Inoue Noriaki. See Pranin (ed.), *Aikido Masters*, 17.

Oshima-ryū. After the Russo-Japanese War, Ueshiba's father invited Kiyoichi Takagi, a young teacher from the Kōdōkan, to teach *jūdō* to local young people in Tanabe.²⁴¹ Ueshiba is also reported to have trained in sword arts, including Kito-ryū, Iso-ryū and Kage-ryū.²⁴²

This diverse martial arts' background has given rise to extensive debate among *aikidōka* about the relative influences of different arts on the evolution of *aikidō*. Accounts vary about how long Ueshiba spent with Takeda,²⁴³ for instance, and there are arguments about the relative influence of sword arts versus unarmed combat modes. These debates are impossible to resolve but the significant point is that the different styles reflected varying modes of combat philosophy. Since these modes are intimately connected to attitudes of mind (for instance, *jū* to pliancy),²⁴⁴ they provided Ueshiba with a vast fund of experience for studying the mind through body motion.

Ueshiba's personal asceticism, spiritual practice and experiences

An important feature of Ueshiba's martial arts' training is that it was conducted simultaneously with ascetic practices. Ueshiba's interest in such spiritual exercises appears to have begun in childhood when he was exposed first to the practices of the Shingon *Mikkyō* sect at the local Jizō-ji (temple) school,²⁴⁵ and next to those of Zen Buddhism at the Hōman-ji Temple. His ascetic practices are said to have begun in earnest at around the age of twenty when he started "the

²⁴¹ Ibid., 5.

²⁴² Article in an unnamed Japanese newspaper published in 1966, translated for *Aiki News*, vol. II, no. 5 (June 1975): 11.

²⁴³ Evidence from Takeda's student registers indicates that Ueshiba studied Daito-ryū jūjutsu from February 1915 to December 1919, see Pranin (ed.), *Aikido Masters*, 6. Daito-ryū's decisive influence on *aikidō* technique is also described in Stanley Pranin, "Editorial Aikido and Daito-ryū: The Unacknowledged Symbiosis," *Aiki News*, no. 71 (June 1986): 3-4, 39.

²⁴⁴ See the discussion of principles of *jūjutsu* in Ratti and Westbrook, *Secrets of the Samurai the Martial Arts of Feudal Japan*, 347-60.

²⁴⁵ Ueshiba Kisshōmaru, *Aikido Kaiso Ueshiba Morihei Den*, 53.

practice of pouring ocean water over his head as a sort of *misogi* exercise to purify the mind and body”.²⁴⁶

He performed daily reverence of the *kami*,²⁴⁷ made trips to sacred places such as the Nachi waterfall and Mt. Kuruma to engage in ascetic practices,²⁴⁸ and participated in retreats and *misogi-kai*.²⁴⁹ *Misogi*²⁵⁰ practices are intrinsic to Shintō and it is revealing that Ueshiba is quoted as saying that he had learnt *aikidō* “through *misogi*”, adding that when in Hokkaido he had practised *misogi* in icy rivers and *chinkon* (a Shintō meditation technique) in the snow.²⁵¹ Ueshiba’s morning routine is described thus:

First he did *misogi* (purification) with water, then prayers before the indoor Shinto shrine, followed by the *chinkon* and other rites. Together all of this occupied a little over an hour and was a daily part of the morning routine. For that reason, our sleep time was limited to about 3 hours. In the summer, Sensei rose at the first faint light of dawn, sometime around 4:00 am.²⁵²

Mention should also be made of several unusual experiences described by Ueshiba which have become legendary. These include the ability to predict the trajectory of bullets²⁵³ and a sensation of being enveloped in golden light after a bout with a high-ranking swordsman in 1925. While it is, of course,

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 45.

²⁴⁷ Pranin (ed.), *Aikido Masters*, 150-51.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 159.

²⁴⁹ Described by Abe Seiseki, a long time friend of Ueshiba in Abe Seiseki, “Interview with Seiseki Abe,” *Aiki News*, no. 45 (1982): 4.

²⁵⁰ A term meaning “purification” or a “purification ceremony”. Vigorous forms of *misogi* (called *kessai*), are similar to the Buddhist practices of cold water austerities (*mizugori* or *suigyō*) which “involve pouring buckets of freezing water over one’s body or standing under a powerful waterfall, often in the dead of winter, in order to attain spiritual strength or shamanistic abilities”. See Brian Bocking, *A Popular Dictionary of Shinto* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995), 124.

²⁵¹ Abe Seiseki, “Interview with Seiseki Abe,” interview by Stanley Pranin, in *Aiki News*, no. 45 (1982): 4.

²⁵² Ibid., 11.

²⁵³ This incident is described in Ueshiba Moritaka (Morihei), “On the Martial Ways of Japan,” *Aiki News International*, no. 42 (1981): 7.

impossible to verify independently the validity of these experiences, it can be observed that, although there may be many fakes, in the history of world spirituality there are many recorded cases of extraordinary phenomena. The distinguished scholar of religion Mircea Eliade (1907-86), for example, has documented experiences of mystic light in a number of traditions, including those of India and China.²⁵⁴

Ueshiba and the state

One possible objection to spirituality in *aikidō* is the apparent disjunction between Ueshiba's teaching of peace and harmony and his links with the navy, army and police, especially at the time of Japan's militarisation in the 1930s. For about a decade from 1927 Ueshiba taught at the Naval Academy, and from around 1932 at the Toyama School for the army, at the Military Staff College and the Military Police School.²⁵⁵ Many high-ranking officers also came to the headquarters *dōjō*, the Kobukan,²⁵⁶ and Ueshiba is reported to have taught the Imperial Palace Guards.²⁵⁷ His prominence at this time is shown in his election as the first president of the All-Japan Budo Enhancement Association.²⁵⁸ He was also appointed martial arts' advisor to various institutions in Manchuria, then a Japanese colony, including Kenkoku University which he visited regularly.²⁵⁹ This military connection continued during World War II when Ueshiba was required to work for the army and navy and to serve at the War Office.

²⁵⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The Two and the One*, trans. J. M. Cohen, First English ed. (London: Harvill Press, 1965), 43-49.

²⁵⁵ Ueshiba Kisshōmaru, *Aikido Kaiso Ueshiba Morihei Den*, 239-40.

²⁵⁶ Saitō Morihiro, "Aiki News Interviews Morihiro Saito," *Aiki News*, vol. II, no. 5 (June 1975): 6.

²⁵⁷ Laszlo Abel, "The martial arts background of Morihei Ueshiba", *Aiki News*, no. 74 (April 1987):58.

²⁵⁸ Stanley Pranin, "Editorial - O-Sensei's Training Example," *Aiki News*, no. 27 (November 1977): 8.

²⁵⁹ Ueshiba Kisshōmaru and Ueshiba Morihei, "Interview with O-Sensei and Kisshomaru Ueshiba (Part II)," *Aiki News*, no. 19 (1976): 5.

Other aspects of Ueshiba's conduct could also be interpreted as conformity with the state's goals, giving the impression that his principle motivation was nationalism. Events of his life which suggest such intent include his participation, with evident enthusiasm, in state projects (such as the colonisation of Hokkaido, Mongolia or Manchuria), his patriotic language and elements of his lifestyle which suggest a tendency towards Kokugaku ("nativism").²⁶⁰ Kokugaku was a school of thought whose main theme was the "perversion of pure Japanese culture by foreign influence", a theme variously interpreted by different scholars. Although not specifically Shintō, it became welded to Shintō thought,²⁶¹ and Kokugaku scholars in the early nineteenth century "produced grand syntheses of nativist ideas and symbols in a utopian vision" which combined agriculture, the concept of a "divine land created by *kami*", tutelary deities, "the emperor as the center of all being", bound together in "a linked harmony of earth, humanity, and the 'imperial way'".²⁶² In his enthusiasm for the *Kojiki*, his veneration of Amaterasu (see photo in Appendix 2, page 168), reverence for the emperor, combining of agriculture with *aikidō* practice at Iwama, and emphasis on Shintō-related values and ascetic practices, Ueshiba can be seen as firmly embedded in this tradition.

It cannot be denied that Ueshiba used patriotic language, referring to the "Great Japanese Spirit (*daiseishin*)",²⁶³ the Imperial Way and Japan's mission in the world,²⁶⁴ the three elements which constituted the concept of *kokutai*, "the

²⁶⁰ The Kokugaku movement was started by Kada Azumaro (1669-1736), head priest of the Fushimi Inari Shrine in Kyoto, who founded a school dedicated to the study of ancient Japanese literature. His followers included Kamo Mabuchi (1697-1769), Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) whose study of the *Kojiki* led him "to believe that this work preserved the original pure Japanese spirituality", and Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843), whose school of thought influenced Onisaburō (see page 142 below). See Yusa, *Japanese Religions*, 88-89.

²⁶¹ Helen Hardacre, "Creating State Shinto: The Great Promulgation Campaign and the New Religions," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 12, no. 1 (1986): 36.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ Ueshiba, "On the Martial Ways of Japan," 5.

²⁶⁴ The concept of Japan's national mission became particularly prominent after the Sino-Japanese War. See Sannosuke Matsumoto, "The Emergence of Imperial Japan Self-Defence or

substance or body of the the nation".²⁶⁵ His extolling of the virtues of *makoto* (sincerity) and *wa* (social harmony), could also be interpreted as evidence of alignment with the ideological values incorporated in the *Kokutai no Hongi* (*The Principles of National Polity*). Published in 1937, this document was "A formal statement of the fundamental concepts behind the nature of the Japanese state",²⁶⁶ whose provisions were "designed to set the ideological course for the Japanese people"²⁶⁷ in the prelude to World War II. However, it should be remembered that *wa* is both a religious concept and a sociopolitical one. Its origins in Japanese thought can be dated to the Seventeen-Article Constitution of Prince Shōtoku, issued in 604 and inspired by Buddhism, which emphasised "concord" as the first principle of community.²⁶⁸ *Makoto*, "truthfulness, honesty and trustworthiness", is the foundation of *wa* and has similar spiritual connotations independent of political ideology.²⁶⁹ A telling indicator of his independent thinking, too, is that on many occasions he prefaced any reference to such concepts with "the true meaning of...", indicating that his interpretation was distinctive.

Also, as Pranin remarks, these were normal views in prewar Japan.²⁷⁰ Although they may mark Ueshiba as a traditionalist, they do not brand him as an ultranationalist but merely as a Japanese citizen seeking inspiration, as many did at a time of Japan's transition from feudal to industrial society, in the values of

Calculated Aggression?," in *Problems in Asian Civilizations*, ed. Marlene Mayo (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1970), 60.

²⁶⁵ Richard Storry, *The Double Patriots a Study of Japanese Nationalism*, Reprint ed. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), 5.

²⁶⁶ Janet E. Hunter, *The Emergence of Modern Japan an Introductory History since 1853* (London: Longman, 1989), 176.

²⁶⁷ Wm. Theodore de Bary (ed.), *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary, 2-vol. ed., vol. I, *Introduction to Oriental Civilizations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 278.

²⁶⁸ Nakamura, *A History of the Development of Japanese Thought*, 3-6.

²⁶⁹ Carter, *Encounter with Enlightenment*, 48.

²⁷⁰ Stanley Pranin, "Editorial," *Aiki News International*, no. 42 (November 1981): 3.

the past. He was, moreover, at pains to distance himself from the rightists: "It is absolutely not a right wing idea. What I am talking about is a system of harmony through spiritual actions."²⁷¹

It is clear, too, that Ueshiba never wholly shared the military outlook. Interviewed by the *Shukan Yomiuri* newspaper in 1956, he said that the military could not understand the spirit of *aikidō*: "Military officers base themselves on battles but I was based on myself, on Aiki".²⁷² His distance from the military is also evident in his adherence to Ōmoto (from 1921 until his death in 1969), an organisation which had a turbulent relationship with the authorities. Ōmoto was twice persecuted during Ueshiba's lifetime, in 1921 (the "First Ōmoto Incident") and again, much more drastically, in 1935 (the "Second Ōmoto Incident"). On the latter occasion, Ōmoto's buildings and grounds in Ayabe and Kameoka were bombed, nearly a thousand followers arrested and Onisaburō sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour. Ueshiba narrowly escaped arrest during the 1935 incident.²⁷³

Ōmoto's attraction for Ueshiba appears to have been twofold. Its headquarters at Ayabe, where Ueshiba took his family to live, provided a simple, congenial environment conducive to the development of a spiritual life. At the same time Onisaburō, despite his flamboyant image, was erudite and well versed in esoteric spiritual practices, such as *kotodama* which, when merged with the concept of *aiki*, formed the basis for the the development of *aikidō*.²⁷⁴

At Deguchi Onisaburō's instigation an organisation, the Budō Sen'yōkai, was established within Ōmoto in 1932 to promote Ueshiba's art throughout the country. This organisation remained active until the repression of Ōmoto in

²⁷¹ Ueshiba Morihei, "Interview with Morihei Ueshiba (1)," 10.

²⁷² Ueshiba Morihei, "Interview with Morihei Ueshiba (2)," *Aiki News*, no. 76 (1987): 18.

²⁷³ Through the auspices of one of his students, the Osaka police chief Tomita Kenji. See Pranin (ed.), *Aikido Masters*, 182 and 226.

²⁷⁴ Ueshiba, *Aikido Kaiso Ueshiba Morihei Den*, 142.

1935.²⁷⁵ Its existence is significant because it was the principal route through which Ueshiba's martial art style was disseminated to people from all walks of life. Members of the public who were not Ōmoto believers also trained there.²⁷⁶ Practitioners in these *dōjō* included old and young, men and women.²⁷⁷ Ueshiba also had many significant friendships outside military circles, such as Goi Masahisa and Nakanishi Koun, a scholar of the *Kojiki*.²⁷⁸

During World War II, the tension between Ueshiba's spiritual beliefs and what he saw as the destructive aims of the military came to a climax, provoking a crisis which led to his withdrawal to the countryside to resolve the paradox. He became increasingly critical of the politicians and military, whom he described as having conspired to "misrepresent" true *budō* which should be "the embodiment of peace, love and etiquette".²⁷⁹

That the events of the war impacted greatly on his thinking is apparent from his preoccupation, in talks given in the 1950s, with the need to create a peaceful world community in which there would be no need for "hydrogen bombs".²⁸⁰ The problem, as he saw it, related to the nature and function of physical force:

When speaking of physical force, no matter how strong a person can be said to be, there is a limit to his strength. When physical power is used it is always defeated. The Japanese participation in the last World War [II] was an example of this. It is mistaken to resort to the use of maximum force in the Japanese martial arts

²⁷⁵ Pranin (ed.), *Aikido Masters*, 10. Kisshōmaru states that this organisation was founded on 13 August 1932 with Deguchi Onisaburō as President and Ueshiba as Chairman (see *Ibid.*, 214.)

²⁷⁶ Kamata Hisao, "Interview with Hisao Kamata," *Aiki News*, no. 49 (June 1982): 12.

²⁷⁷ An example of Ueshiba's female pupils is Kunigoshi Takako (b. 1911) who entered the Kobukan *dōjō* in 1933. A student of Japan Women's Fine Arts University, she drew the illustrations for the book *Budō Renshū* published under Ueshiba's name in 1933.

²⁷⁸ Ueshiba, *Aikido Kaiso Ueshiba Morihei Den*, 258.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁸⁰ Ueshiba Kisshōmaru and Ueshiba Morihei, "Interview with O-Sensei and Kisshomaru Ueshiba Part IV," *Aiki News*, no. 21 (1977): 7.

(budō). On the other hand, it appears at first glance that by rejecting the use of force in the practice of martial arts you reject their essential nature. Can there be such a thing as a martial art which rejects the use of force?...While witnessing the course of the Pacific War, I became deeply distressed and withdrew to the Aikido shrine at Iwama. There I spent three years in deep meditation and ended up reevaluating my training in light of this idea. Finally, I understood the concept underlying martial arts [武道] that is, to stop [止] (control) the opponent's weapon [戈] (Note [by editor] that these two radicals are the component parts of the character 武 (bu) usually translated as "martial," "fighting," etc.). This is the state of mind called "agatsu".²⁸¹

Martial arts' practice was banned by the occupation forces but Iwama was far enough from the capital for training there not to be noticed. Such was Ueshiba's dissociation from the military at this time, however, that the occupation forces do not appear to have seen him as any kind of threat. As advisor to the Dai Nihon Butokukai he could have been indicted for war crimes as many of his contemporaries were,²⁸² but Shioda Gōzō notes that this did not happen.²⁸³ On the contrary, Ueshiba was invited to demonstrate *aikidō* to occupation troops at the US military base in Yokohama immediately after the war.²⁸⁴

Ueshiba's thought: sources and transmission

As is traditional in all the arts classed as *-dō* ("Ways"), Ueshiba's world view was expressed mostly through action. His *aikidō* performance has been described as a demonstration of "living forms",²⁸⁵ which left a lasting impression on those who knew him, recorded in many vivid accounts. In his view, the understanding

²⁸¹ Cited in an article in an unnamed Japanese newspaper published in 1966 translated for *Aiki News*, no. 3 (June 1974), 4.

²⁸² Jacques Gravereau, *Le Japon l'ère de Hirohito*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Notre Siècle* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1988), 171.

²⁸³ Pranin (ed.), *Aikido Masters*, 194.

²⁸⁴ Saitō Morihiro, "Interview with Morihiro Saito," *Aiki News*, vol. II, no. 5 (June 1975): 6.

²⁸⁵ Cauhépe and Kuang, *Les Arts martiaux intériorisés*, 38.

he transmitted could not be confined in words: "Aiki is something that can never be encompassed by words, brushed or spoken...Speak not words, then, in striving towards enlightenment".²⁸⁶ It was not, however, a technical or theoretical understanding. As a Western *aikidōka*, Virginia Mayhew, remarks, "O-Sensei was not a teacher of technique. You learned on a different level".²⁸⁷ Another conspicuous feature of his oral and written presentation is the complete absence of any reference at all to Western theories of education. In an age when Japan was participating in the Olympic Games²⁸⁸ and such theories had influenced the training method of at least one other martial art (*jūdō*), this lack of interest is striking. In contrast, what predominates in his discourse is an overwhelming concern with matters spiritual.

As Ueshiba's style of oral delivery was unsystematic, "always changing",²⁸⁹ and in language replete with esoteric references to Shintō mythology, Buddhism and Daoism, and the discrete terminology of the martial arts, some *aikidōka* said they found it difficult to understand him.²⁹⁰ This might give the impression that Ueshiba was merely shrouding his art in meaningless mystical mumbo-jumbo at a time when the reinvented values of *budō* were being extolled by the state. Others, however, such as Nadeau, suggest that the meaning could be grasped intuitively, and that those who were interested in "spiritual awareness" understood him.²⁹¹

²⁸⁶ Ueshiba Morihei, "O-Sensei's songs of the way (4)," ed. Abe Seiseki, *Aiki News*, no. 116 (1999): 46-47.

²⁸⁷ Susan Perry (ed.), *Remembering O-Sensei Living and Training with Morihei Ueshiba, Founder of Aikido* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 2002), 35.

²⁸⁸ Japan entered the Olympic Games for the first time in 1912, largely due to the efforts of Kanō Jigorō, see Brian N. Watson, *The Father of Judo a Biography of Jigoro Kano* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2000), 116-29.

²⁸⁹ "Interview with Rinjiro Shirata (1)," *Aiki News*, no. 62 (July 1984): 8.

²⁹⁰ Kobayashi Yasuo, "In the Classic Hombu Style...", *Aiki News*, no. 70 (March 1986): 9-10.

²⁹¹ Robert Nadeau, "Robert Nadeau," in *Aikido in America*, ed. John Stone and Ron Meyer (Berkeley, Calif.: Frog, 1995), 63.

His lectures can therefore be seen as deliberately evocative and inspirational rather than rational and methodical. In keeping with spiritual traditions which hold that the Absolute cannot be expressed in words, he chose not to theorise but to convey meaning by suggestion or example. This is borne out, too, by his use of calligraphy (see Appendix 2, Figure 3, page 168) and poetry, two other typically Japanese “cultivational ways” associated with “focussing, clearing, purifying, and transforming the body-mind, thereby opening the possibility of realization”.²⁹²

As noted, the sources of Ueshiba’s thought presently available are both piecemeal and scattered (for example, many issues of the Budō Sen’yōkai’s newsletter *Budō*, in which his ideas were conveyed, were destroyed in the Second Ōmoto Incident). Nevertheless, there is a sufficiently large body of published material which, when assembled, allows an overall picture of his outlook to be sketched. The works available span about forty years, from 1930 to his death in 1969. Numerous of his contemporaries attest to a considerable evolution of Ueshiba’s thought over this period, but as some of the material is difficult to date (reprints appearing in *Aiki News*, for example, do not always provide a date for the original source), no definitive chronology can be established. Some important items, however, such as the four lectures published as *Takemusu Aiki*, which are held to represent the culmination of his thought, can be roughly dated to the 1950s.

As mentioned, Ueshiba did not extol a doctrine. However, from a reading of his lectures and writings, several themes emerge. These include his view of the meaning of “true” *budō*, the role of *aikidō* practice in the temporal realm and *aiki* as an aspect of the divine-human relation.

²⁹² Carter, *Encounter with Enlightenment*, 171-2. For examples of Ueshiba’s poetry see Ueshiba Morihei, *The Essence of Aikido*, ed. and compiled by John Stevens (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1999), 39-76.

Ueshiba's personal quest began, he said, with the search for the true meaning of *bu*, the Chinese character for which means, as noted, "to stop a spear". The determination to find the "essence" of *budō*, a meaning that differed qualitatively from the usage of ancient Japanese martial arts as merely "a fighting tool" serving the "greed" of local warlords, appears to have provided the stimulus for his spiritual investigations from an early date.²⁹³ An intimation of how he connected it with spiritual matters was already apparent in 1933 when he wrote: "Japanese budo is the mutual enshrinement and coming together of the appearance and workings of God [*kami*] with the godly mind of love of all beings."²⁹⁴

By his own testimony, through associating his martial arts' mind-body training with the teaching of Japanese religion, he reached the conclusion that the only effective way of "stopping a conflict" was through the very eradication of the concept of enemy. Although perhaps a revolutionary concept in martial arts' terms, the idea of the non-egocentric vision, in which no enemy would be perceived, was well established in East Asian religious teaching of non-duality.²⁹⁵ "The mistake," he said, "is to begin to think that budo means to have an opponent or enemy; someone you want to be stronger than, someone you want to throw down."²⁹⁶

On the basis of this understanding, he reformulated the techniques of *aiki-budō* to create the form of martial art known as *aikidō* from the 1940s. The essential feature of this new form was its emphasis on *aiki* as means, not to win a fight, but to bring it to harmonious conclusion: "Aikido cannot be anything but a

²⁹³ Ueshiba Kisshōmaru and Ueshiba Morihei, "An Interview with O-Sensei and Kisshomaru Ueshiba Part I," 8.

²⁹⁴ Ueshiba Morihei, "A Lecture by President Ueshiba O-Sensei 'Kannagara No Jutsu' (The Art of Shinto)," *Aiki News*, no. 60 (March 1984): 20.

²⁹⁵ Cauhépe and Kuang, *Les Arts martiaux intériorisés*, 52.

²⁹⁶ Ueshiba Morihei, "Excerpts from the Writings and Transcribed Lectures of the Founder, Morihei Ueshiba," 7.

martial art of love. It cannot be a martial art of violence...The state of mind of the Aikidoist must be peaceful and totally non-violent. That is to say, that special state of mind which brings violence into a state of harmony...The true state of Aikido is love and harmony".²⁹⁷

His vision gave abundant testimony to the possibility that this practice would lead to spiritual understanding, as attested in the statement: "True budo gives you the ability to perceive and understand that Universal activities take place within you."²⁹⁸ This idea of *aikidō* practice as spiritual endeavour emerges again and again: "the body is the medium through which your true self is expressed...Ultimately, the complex and subtle workings of life originate in the Original God and occur within human beings".²⁹⁹ The prerequisite for such knowledge was to understand oneself: "Knowing yourself is knowing the Universe."³⁰⁰ Ueshiba did not claim to have been the first martial artist to realise this, but only that the *aikidō* he formulated after World War II offered an easier way to understanding than practice of older martial arts, and was open to all.³⁰¹

Ueshiba's long personal practice of ascetic disciplines drawn from Japan's religious traditions gave him a rich vocabulary in which to express these "Universal activities" and "complex and subtle workings". Shintō themes are apparent, for example, in his descriptions of the harmonious flow of cosmic life, "manifested, without exception, in all deities and buddhas, all nature, animals, birds, fish, and even in insects".³⁰² Buddhist concepts appear in references to the "Great Emptiness [which] was born from Kuu (Mu) in which everything exists

²⁹⁷ Ueshiba Kisshōmaru and Ueshiba Morihei, "An Interview with O-Sensei and Kisshomaru Ueshiba (Part I)," 5.

²⁹⁸ Ueshiba Morihei, "Takemusu aiki 4," 77.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 80.

³⁰⁰ Ueshiba Morihei 植芝 盛平, 武産合気 三 ("Takemusu aiki 3"). In 武産合気 (*Takemusu aiki*), ed. Takahashi Hideo 高橋 英雄 (著). (Tokyo: Byakkō Shinkōkai, 1986), 65.

³⁰¹ Ueshiba Morihei, "Takemusu aiki 4," 70.

³⁰² Ueshiba Morihei, "Takemusu aiki 2," 45.

and nothing exists”,³⁰³ and Daoist themes in the “All-pervasive Universal Principle...”,³⁰⁴ the “union of yin and yang”, “the unity of soul or spirit with the material world”,³⁰⁵ and “the grand design of fire and water breathing through the Great Universe”.³⁰⁶

In keeping with the predominant Japanese tradition of self-cultivation already noted (see page 38), in Ueshiba’s scheme the requirement for reaching this understanding was through one’s own effort: “By looking closely at history, from the Age of the Gods onwards, one must come to a realization of this Path by one’s own efforts.”³⁰⁷ *Aikidō* did not, therefore, offer a means to apprehension of absolute truth through reliance on an external agency or any written ethical code. It was implicit, however, that ethical behaviour, adapted to circumstance, would be the inevitable consequence of practising *aikidō*, provided that the purpose of such practice was correctly understood as training of both body and mind: “this means that we must perform austere physical training (*shugyo*) with our bodies while our *kokoro* (spirit/mind) remains ever mindful of what it means to be a ‘seeker’(*shugyo-sha*)”.³⁰⁸

If practised in this way, *aikidō* would have the transformative function of *misogi* (“Thus, all my techniques are purification (*misogi*)... From my point of view, *aiki* is a great purification...”)³⁰⁹ The essential point was to understand

³⁰³ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 1,” 35.

³⁰⁴ Ueshiba Morihei, “Mysteries Aikido Okugi (Doka) (the Secret Significance of Aikido) (Poetic Songs of the Way),” *Aiki News International*, no. 46 (1982): 10.

³⁰⁵ Ueshiba Morihei, “O-Sensei’s Songs of the Way (1),” ed. Abe Seiseki, *Aikido Journal*, no. 113 (1998): 38.

³⁰⁶ Ueshiba Morihei, “O-Sensei’s Songs of the Way (6),” ed. Abe Seiseki, *Aikido Journal* no. 118 (1999): 48.

³⁰⁷ Ueshiba Morihei, “Excerpts from the Writings,” *Aiki News*, no. 52 (January 1983): 5.

³⁰⁸ Ueshiba Morihei, “Mysteries Aikido Okugi (Doka) (The Secret Significance of Aikido) (Poetic Songs of the Way),” *Aiki News*, no. 46 (March 1982): 6.

³⁰⁹ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 3,” 57-58.

aikidō as an instrument for effecting a transformation of oneself, winning over one's discordant mind and overcoming the constraints of ego-centredness:

Aikido is Ai (love). You make this great love of the universe your heart, and then you must make your own mission the protection and love of all things. To accomplish this mission must be the true Budo. True Budo means to win over yourself and eliminate the fighting heart of the enemy... No, it is a way to absolute self-perfection in which the very enemy is eliminated. The technique of Aiki is ascetic training and a way through which you reach a state of unification of body and spirit by the realization of the principle of heaven.³¹⁰

His distance from the military point of view now becomes apparent, for he considered that it was their "emphasis on the self" which, "if applied generally on a large scale, would bring destruction to the world".³¹¹ This is in marked contrast to the Japanese military's own view of itself in the 1930s as epitomising the spirit of egolessness in willingness to sacrifice their lives for Japan.

In an age when Neo-Confucianist virtues of "benevolence, righteousness, loyalty and filial piety"³¹² still formed the backbone of education in Japan, stressed anew in the Imperial Rescript on Education, issued by the Ministry of Education in 1890, and which remained an important pillar of the education system until 1945, he was similarly critical of much prevailing social ethic, suggesting a more non-conformist view than might superficially be supposed:

though the ideals of modern people are expressed in glowing terms of service to mankind and philanthropy, in actual fact, most live completely for their own advantage. For this reason, although

³¹⁰ Ueshiba Kisshōmaru and Ueshiba Morihei, "Interview with O-Sensei and Kisshomaru Ueshiba – Part IV," 6.

³¹¹ Ueshiba Moritaka (Morihei), "On the Martial Ways of Japan," *Aiki News*, no. 42 (November 1981): 5.

³¹² Spinks, "Indoctrination and Re-Education of Japan's Youth," 59.

the martial arts are flourishing in modern society, their practice never reaches to the depths of genuine bu (shinbu).³¹³

As has been seen, Ueshiba was concerned with the plight of humankind, and it was precisely the destructiveness of World War II that prompted a revolution in his thinking. So *aikidō* was not only a means of personal transformation but also a way to build “a heaven on earth”,³¹⁴ as expressed in the following exhortation:

We must accomplish our missions as human beings and become guideposts for the Great Union and Harmony of the Universal Family. Therefore, we must understand Universal Truth, the true state of things, and attain oneness with the mind of God [*kamisama*]. We must learn from the manifestations and works of God in this Great Universe, and assist in His administration serving as a sword (*tsurugi*).³¹⁵

The above analysis shows that, according to Ueshiba's testimony, *aikidō* incorporated the elements defined here as aspects of spirituality (see page 8). In his view it provided a means of connecting with “one's true self” which was synonymous with “core reality”. Through its role as *misogi* it provided a means of action that would give “value and meaning to life”. The emphasis on harmony, meanwhile, enjoined “interconnectedness with the Other” in the form of one's fellow human being, the divine, and the natural world. Finally, actualisation of these concepts by one's own effort would provide “a state of security with a sense of worthwhile purpose”.

³¹³ Ueshiba Moritaka (Morihei), “On the Martial Ways of Japan,” 5.

³¹⁴ Ueshiba Kisshōmaru and Ueshiba Morihei, “An Interview with O-Sensei and Kisshomaru Ueshiba Part I,” 6.

³¹⁵ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 1,” 29.

Chapter Three: Aikidō and Daoism - the transmutation of ki

As shown, the central theme of Ueshiba's evolved martial art was *ai-ki* (harmony of *ki*), a theory derived from Daito-ryū jūjutsu (which used a method termed *aiki in-yō hō*, "the doctrine of 'Harmony of mind based on the concept of Ying and Yang'"),³¹⁶ but elaborated further under the influence of the Ōmoto religion. Describing the origins of Daito-ryū, Omiya Shirō explains that the concept of *aiki* was central to its methods, developed through the "study and practice of *ki* which has always been important in Asian culture" and "stressed again and again in Chinese philosophy".³¹⁷

Despite the centrality of *aiki* in Ueshiba's discourse, and the fact that the notion of *ki* has a vital place in Chinese metaphysics, relatively few books about *aikidō* today make any mention at all of the contribution of Daoist thought to *aikidō*. Although the concept of harmony of *ki* has antecedents in Daoist thought, and Ueshiba referred frequently to the notion of *yin* and *yang* (*in-yō* in Japanese)³¹⁸ and five-element theory, which are among ancient Chinese ideas absorbed into Daoism,³¹⁹ the assumption often is that the underpinnings of *aikidō* bear no relation to the latter.

In contrast to this apparently widespread view, Ueshiba's son Kisshōmaru made it abundantly clear that *aikidō* owes a great deal to the

³¹⁶ Frédéric, *A Dictionary of the Martial Arts*, 5.

³¹⁷ Shirō Omiya, *The Hidden Roots of Aikido Aiki Jujutsu Daitoryu* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1998), 17-18.

³¹⁸ For example, "neutralize the blow by seizing the initiative and applying yin and yang (water and fire)" in Ueshiba, *Budō*, 35.

³¹⁹ The origin of the concepts of *yin* and *yang* and the five elements is lost in antiquity. Wing-tsit Chan describes the doctrine of *yin* and *yang* as holding that "all things and events are products of two elements, forces, or principles: yin, which is negative, passive, weak, and destructive, and yang, which is positive, active, strong and constructive". The five elements or agents (*wu-hsing* – meaning "five actions or operations" – that is Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth) elaborate the doctrine of *yin* and *yang*, to which they add the idea of rotation. See Wing-tsit Chan (translator and compiler), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, First Princeton paperback ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 244.

Chinese concepts of *ki* as “the essential principle of harmony” and the “source of creativity” and of *yin-yang* dualism.³²⁰ In addition to Kisshōmaru, a number of senior *aikidōka* have also commented on the relationship between Daoist thought and *aikidō*. These include Saotome Mitsugi,³²¹ the French practitioners J. D. Cauhépé, A. Kuang, A. Protin and P. Warcollier, and the Canadian practitioner Henry Kono.³²²

One explanation for the general reluctance to refer to Daoist influence in *aikidō* may be Japanese pride in its martial arts as a native creation, or strained relations with China, especially during and after World War II when *aikidō* began to become known outside Japan. It may also result from lack of awareness of the extent of Daoist influence on both Japanese culture and Japanese martial arts. Nor may many practitioners be aware that Ushitora-no-Konjin, the folk deity who inspired the foundress of Ōmoto and whom Ueshiba revered daily at a small shrine in Iwama,³²³ was of Daoist origin. Kono remarks, for instance, that in his view sensitivity to *yin* and *yang* is crucial to *aikidō* practice, but that when he asked about it at the headquarters *dōjō* in Japan, “nobody had a clue!”³²⁴

Daoist influence on Japanese culture

Because Daoism did not develop as a separate religion in Japan, its influence on Japanese culture is generally less well appreciated, particularly by Westerners, than that of, for example, Buddhism, which also entered Japan from China. The

³²⁰ Ueshiba Kisshōmaru, *The Spirit of Aikido*, 21.

³²¹ Saotome Mitsugi (b. 1937) began practising *aikidō* in Japan in the 1950s. He travelled to the United States in 1975 where he established the Aikido Schools of Ueshiba.

³²² Norm Ibuki, *An Interview with Henry Kono* [Electronic article] (Aikido Journal online, 2003 [accessed on 2003]), available from <http://www.aikidojournal.com/new/article.asp?ArticleID=435>. Born in Vancouver in 1927, Henry Kono trained with Ueshiba Morihei in the 1960s during a visit to Japan. He later returned to Toronto where he taught *aikidō*.

³²³ Gaku Homma, *A Day in the Life of the Founder Morihei Ueshiba, April 1961* [Electronic article] (Nippon Kan, 2003 [accessed on 2003]), available from http://www.nippon-kan.org/senseis_articles/day-in-the-life.html.

³²⁴ Ibuki, *An Interview with Henry Kono*.

Daoist influence on Japanese culture nevertheless dates to early times and some scholars have suggested that it may have been much more extensive than often recognised. Toshio Kuroda, for example, has gone as far as to suggest that the term *shintō* (a word of Chinese origin) was originally used to describe Daoist practices in Japan which “steadily passed into Japan between the first century A.D. and the period when the *Nihon shoki* was compiled”. Such Daoist elements, he suggests, include “veneration of swords and mirrors as religious symbols”, the term *tennō* (“lord of the universe” in Daoism, used to designate the emperor in Japanese), and “the concept of *daiwa* (meaning a state of ideal peace, but in Japan used to refer to Yamato, the center of the country)”. So although a “systematic form of Taoism” may not have been introduced, there is evidence that Daoism was a strong force in Japanese culture until at least medieval times when Buddhism became more prominent.³²⁵ An example of the extent to which Daoist thought, concerning, for instance, *yin-yang*/five-element theory and the principles of the *I Ching* (*Book of Change*), had become “embedded in the fabric of Japanese life” by the sixth and seventh centuries is provided by the activities at that time of the government office, the Yin-Yang Bureau.³²⁶

As stated, it is usually considered that Chinese thought began to have a marked influence on Japanese culture from the sixth century.³²⁷ Daoist and Confucian world views thoroughly permeated Japanese society from this early date, and were all the more easily assimilated where they could be equated with pre-existing native Japanese concepts. Daoism’s emphasis on the human person as a microcosmic reflection of the universe, for example, was particularly congenial to the Shintōist outlook with its focus on the spirituality of the natural

³²⁵ Kuroda Toshio, James C. Dobbins, and Suzanne Gay, “Shinto in the History of Japanese Religion,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 7, no. 1 (1981): 6-7.

³²⁶ Felicia G. Bock, *Classical Learning and Taoist Practices in Early Japan with a Translation of Books Xvi and Xx of the Engi-Shiki*, trans. Felicia G Bock, *Occasional Paper No. 17* (Tempe, Ariz.: Center for Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 1985), 9-22.

³²⁷ See, for example, the description of the adoption of features of Chinese civilization during the reign of Empress Suiko (592-628) in de Bary, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 34-37.

world. It may also be that both Daoism and Japan's early *kami*-cults had an even more ancient common heritage, for the Shintō symbol, the *mitsu tomoe*, a group of three comma shapes (*magatama*) appearing in a circle, has been interpreted as a variant of the *yin-yang* symbol representing cosmic vital energy in motion.³²⁸ Daoist thought remained subtly ingrained in Japanese culture such that in the eighteenth century it was largely in Daoist terms that the Neo-Shintōist scholar Kamo Mabuchi (1697-1769) criticised Confucianism.³²⁹ It should also be remembered that Daoist thought influenced the development of Ch'an Buddhism (from which Japanese Zen developed), Shugendō and Japanese folk religion.³³⁰

Ueshiba was well aware of the influence of Chinese thought on Japanese culture, for he referred to many things taken as "our own unique Japanese culture" as having originated in India or China.³³¹ As he inclined towards nativism, however, it appears unlikely that he deliberately studied Daoist belief and practice. Perceived similarities between some Daoism-based Chinese martial arts (such as *Pa Kua*)³³² and *aikidō*, however, have led some *aikidōka* to speculate that Ueshiba might have studied them during his frequent visits to Manchuria, but there is no definitive evidence for this. On the other hand, the ground in which Ueshiba was operating was so infused with Daoist thought that it would be surprising if he had been unaware of it. There were, too, pronounced Daoist traces in the martial arts' legacy that he inherited.

³²⁸ Bernard Marillier, *Ba-Ba Shinto*, Collection Ba-Ba (Puisseaux: Pardès, 1999), 95-96.

³²⁹ de Bary, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 9.

³³⁰ Ian Reader, "Folk Religion," in *Japanese Religions Past & Present*, ed. Ian Reader, Esben Andreasen, and Finn Steffánsson (Folkestone: Japan Library, 1993), 50.

³³¹ Ueshiba Moritaka (Morihei), "On the Martial Ways of Japan," 5.

³³² *Pa Kua*, "Eight Trigrams Palm", is a Chinese martial art revived in the eighteenth century by Tung Hui-ch'uan who claimed to have learnt it from a Daoist priest. Movements in *Pa Kua* reflect the oscillation of *yin* and *yang* and the permutation of trigrams in the *I Ching*. As in *aikidō*, the movements are circular and evasive. See Paul Wildish, *The Big Book of Ch'i* (London: Thorsons, 2000), 124-25.

Daoism and the Japanese martial arts

The origins of the Chinese martial arts are a subject of debate, but the belief is widely held that *tai-ch'i-chuan*, *kung-fu* and *pa-kua*, for example, derive directly from Daoist breathing and gymnastic exercises.³³³ Although the story that the Indian monk Bodhiharma founded the Chinese martial arts at the Shao-lin monastery in Honan in the early sixth century is considered by many to be a myth,³³⁴ it is nevertheless often contended that "the basic philosophical underpinnings of the Chinese martial arts are Taoist", and that the Daoist breath control techniques today known as *qi-gong* played an important role in their development.³³⁵ The term *qi-gong* (*kikō* in Japanese) is a modern appellation, one of its antecedents being *dao-yin* (literally "leading and guiding the energy" or "guiding the qi and extending the limbs").³³⁶

Chinese gymnastic influence in the Chinese martial arts may not necessarily be Daoist, but there is ample evidence that Daoism appropriated these ancient Chinese therapeutic gymnastics,³³⁷ and that they formed part of a variety of prescriptions for nourishing and circulating *ki*: "The loosening of the limbs and proper guidance of the *qi* is one of the essential functions of *daoyin*."³³⁸

³³³ Ratti and Westbrook, *Secrets of the Samurai the Martial Arts of Feudal Japan*, 363.

³³⁴ Charles Holcombe, "Theater of Combat: A Critical Look at the Chinese Martial Arts," [Electronic article republished from *Historian* 52, no. 3 (1990): 411-31. Michigan State University Press, 1990 [accessed on 23 June 2002]. Available from <http://pears2.lib.ohio-state.edu/FULLTEXT/JR-ADM/holcom.htm>.

³³⁵ Charles Holcombe, "The Daoist Origins of the Martial Arts," *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* 2, no. 1 (1993): 12.

³³⁶ Kenneth S. Cohen, *The Way of Qigong the Art and Science of Chinese Energy Healing* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), 13.

³³⁷ Catherine Despeux, "Gymnastics: The Ancient Tradition," in *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, ed. Yoshinobu Sakade, *Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies Vol. 61* (Ann Arbor: Centre for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1989), 225.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 238.

The extent to which Daoist influence permeated the Japanese martial arts is not known but Chinese origins are claimed for some Japanese martial arts (such as *karate-dō*, developed during the Chinese occupation of Okinawa in the sixteenth century).³³⁹ Cameron Hurst III refers generally to Chinese beliefs pervading the Japanese martial arts in the Tokugawa period,³⁴⁰ and Protin, among others, suggests that the principle of *jū* (pliancy, suppleness), used in the *jūjutsu* schools from which both *jūdō* and *aikidō* derive, was itself an application of the principle of accord (*wa*) and harmony (*ai*) “cornerstone of Taoist theory”.³⁴¹ It has further been suggested that *jūjutsu* itself was brought from China by Chin Gempin (1587-1674) who taught techniques of Chinese *ch'uan fa* (“fist way”) to three *rōnin* (masterless samurai). Draeger, however, considered that it was more likely that Gempin merely gave an “important impetus” to arts already in existence.³⁴²

Interestingly, Friday refers to the law of “Yin and Yang as One” (*inyō ittai*)³⁴³ being applied in the combat philosophy of the Kashima-Shinryū swordsmanship school as a method of absorbing the opponent's power rather than clashing with it in linear confrontation. Friday also describes the highest expression of *shinbu*, the ideal that Ueshiba sought (see page 30), as being the skill of *hōyo-dōka*, translated roughly as “acceptance and resorption”, some aspects of which were expressed by the Kashima-Shinryū as *aiki*.³⁴⁴ The concept of *aiki* itself may originally have been a synonym for the harmony of *yin* and *yang*. A number of other Daoist symbols, such as the dragon (representing *yang*)

³³⁹ Frédéric, *A Dictionary of the Martial Arts*, 98.

³⁴⁰ Cameron Hurst III, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan*, 70.

³⁴¹ Protin, *Aikido un art martial*, 71.

³⁴² Donn F. Draeger, *Classical Budo*, 3 vols., vol. II, *The Martial Arts & Ways of Japan* (New York: Weatherhill, 1973), 112-13.

³⁴³ Friday and Humitake, *Legacies of the Sword*, 68.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

and water (representing *yin*)³⁴⁵ can also be found in Daito-ryū, for instance in the alternate names of techniques, as in *aiki-age* (also known as “fire-dragon movement” directed upwards) and *aiki-sage* (“water-dragon movement” directed downwards).³⁴⁶

Daoist thought also influenced the martial arts through the medium of Chinese medicine which was practised in Japan from at least the tenth century. Daoist exercises are referred to, for example, in a medical manual, the *Ishinpō* (*Essential Medical Methods*), which was presented to Emperor Enyu by the official acupuncturist in 984.³⁴⁷ That such texts were known to practitioners of Daito-ryū is suggested by Omiya's reference to the *Shin'ihō*, which he describes as “an early text on ancient Japanese medicine compiled by Tanba no Yasuyori (912-95)”.³⁴⁸

Daoism and the nature of reality

In order to understand the significance of the relationship between *aikidō* and Daoism for spirituality in *aikidō*, an appreciation of the Daoist world view is necessary. This is doubly important because the word “Daoist” is often used vaguely and with sweeping generalisation, especially in popular literature, including books on the martial arts.³⁴⁹ Daoism was for a long time interpreted by Western scholars as consisting of two separate strands: the philosophical (*Dao*

³⁴⁵ For a description of this symbolism, see J. C. Cooper, *Taoism the Way of the Mystic* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1972), 107-12.

³⁴⁶ Omiya, *The Hidden Roots of Aikido*, 36.

³⁴⁷ Yoshinobu Sakade, “Longevity Techniques in Japan: Ancient Sources and Contemporary Studies,” in *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, ed. Livia Kohn and Yoshinobu Sakade, *Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies Vol. 61* (Ann Arbor: Centre for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1989), 3.

³⁴⁸ Omiya, *The Hidden Roots of Aikido*, 18.

³⁴⁹ Nathan Sivin, “On the Word ‘Taoist’ as a Source of Perplexity. With Special Reference to the Relations of Science and Religion in Traditional China,” *History of Religions* 17, no. 3 and 4 (1978). (Republished as electronic article [accessed on 18 December 2003]), available from Taoist Studies in the World Wide Web Essays on Taoism, http://venus.unive.it/pregadio/taoism/taoism_essays.html.

Chia), characterised by the “thinkers”, and the religious (*Dao Chiao*), characterised by ritual and practices considered “nonsensical and superstitious”.³⁵⁰ New scholarship now tends to the view, however, that this is an artificial distinction and that the apparently separate strands merely represent different aspects of a vast network of related doctrines which interacted with each other, and with other Chinese beliefs (of Buddhism, Confucianism and folk religion), over many centuries.³⁵¹ This new perspective reveals Daoism as a rich, multifarious tradition, incorporating a wide variety of concepts and practices leading to “enlightenment” in the Daoist sense. The existence of such practices, which are comparable in profundity with those of the other great East Asian religions, was not hitherto widely known outside China, and their meaning has consequently not yet been widely explored.

Daoism is thus now more often seen as a religion incorporating both the views of the “philosophers”, Lao Tzu (to whom was attributed authorship of the *Daodejing*) and Chuang Tzu, as well as practices concerned with rites, exorcism, magic, deities and techniques of prolonging life (termed “longevity techniques”). One of China’s “Three Teachings”, it co-existed and interacted with Buddhism and Confucianism for hundreds of years. Despite its mixing with these religions, however, scholars such as Livia Kohn maintain that Daoism constitutes a “unique religious tradition” and that there is a “definite distinction” to be made between its beliefs and those of China’s two other main teachings.³⁵²

The elements of Daoism of most interest to this study are, on the one hand, the ontological view of the philosophers, and on the other, the practices of prolonging life. These were previously considered to relate only to longevity but, in Daoism’s newly recognised broader context, are now seen to have functions

³⁵⁰ Livia Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Three Pines Press, 2001), 1-2.

³⁵¹ Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism Growth of a Religion*, trans. Phyllis Brooks (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1997), 3.

³⁵² Kohn, *Daoism*, 3.

related to the “phenomenon of mysticism”.³⁵³ The noted French scholar Isabelle Robinet, for instance, considers that the Daoist exercises of manipulation of *ki* were “above all a technique of enlightenment including a method of controlling both the world and oneself and a means of fashioning (*zaohua*) and hence understanding in the sense of an existential and intellectual integration”.³⁵⁴ Their significance as methods of achieving enlightenment is also becoming clearer as close correlations with Indian enlightenment techniques emerge. The comparison is possible because of the similarities between the idea of *ki* and the yogic concept of *prāna*. A definition of *prāna* by the twentieth-century Indian teacher Sri Swami Sivananda is (apart from the reference to the Atman) indistinguishable from most attempted definitions of *ki*:

Prana is the sum total of all energy that is manifest in the universe. It is the sum total of all the forces in nature. It is the sum total of all latent forces and powers which are hidden in men and which lie everywhere around us. Heat, light, electricity, magnetism are the manifestations of Prana. All forces, all powers and Prana spring from the fountain or common source, ‘Atman’. All physical forces, all mental forces come under the category ‘Prana’. It is force on every plane of being, from the highest to the lowest. Whatever moves or works or has life, is but an expression or manifestation of Prana.³⁵⁵

The similarity between the Hatha yogic science of *prānāyāma*³⁵⁶ and Daoist breathing exercises was noted by the distinguished historian of religion Mircea Eliade (1907-86) but, in the context of the scholarship of the time, he saw

³⁵³ James Miller, *Daoism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 55-56.

³⁵⁴ Robinet, *Taoism*, 216.

³⁵⁵ Sri Swami Sivananda, *The Science of Pranayama* (World Wide Web) [Electronic book] (A Divine Life Society Publication, 2000 [accessed on 2003]), available from <http://www.SivanandaDlshq.org/>.

³⁵⁶ *Prānāyāma*, meaning “control of the *prāna*-stream” is a technique which aims “to unite *ha* (the breath of the sun, known as *prānā*) with *tha* (the breath of the moon, known as *apāna*)”, a practice which activates the *kundalinī* through the *chakras*. See Stephan Schuhmacher and Gert Woerner (eds.), *The Rider Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion a Complete Survey of the Teachers, Traditions, and Literature of Asian Wisdom* (London: Rider, 1989), 128.

them as aimed only at achieving longevity rather than transcendent spiritual states.³⁵⁷ More recently, however, Bernard Baudouin has remarked on the significance of the affinities between the Daoist techniques (which he terms Daoist yoga) and the Indian yogic tradition:

In many cases, numerous similarities can be seen between this type of [Daoist] yoga and the Hindu kundalini yoga which makes reference to seven sources of energy (chakras located along the spinal column) which must be one by one activated and regenerated so that the fusion of energies can take place in complete harmony with the forces of the Universe.³⁵⁸

The full meaning of the Daoist practices has not yet been widely explored outside China, however, and the task is complicated by the complexity of the Daoist literature which is vast and largely unresearched by modern scholars.³⁵⁹

Daoism and *aikidō*: common concepts

Before considering whether *aikidō* incorporates spiritual exercises in the Daoist mode, a comparison of the *aikidō* and Daoist world views is necessary to determine whether the two outlooks have any common intent. It is difficult to be precise about Daoism which is founded on a vast complex of interrelated and continually evolving ideas rather than a codified doctrine or systematic teaching.³⁶⁰ It has no single doctrinal source, no writing that can be pointed to as a unique representation of the Daoist view. The *Daodejing* itself, popularly considered the scripture of Daoism, appears to be not “the expositions of two

³⁵⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Techniques du Yoga*, Revised ed., *Collection Idées* (n.p.: Gallimard, 1975), 295-99.

³⁵⁸ Bernard Baudouin, *Le Taoisme un principe d'harmonie, Spiritualités du Monde, Religions, Mystères et Traditions* (Paris: Editions de Vecchi, 1997), 95.

³⁵⁹ Robinet, *Taoism*, 1-2.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

great philosophers but rather the product of a prolonged period of accretion”.³⁶¹ Nevertheless, its defining features can be said to lie in its “specific cosmology centred on Dao as the underlying power and constituting pattern of the universe”, the mediation of the Dao through *ki*, and the idea of aligning oneself with the Dao “creating harmony and a sense of participation in it” which “will bring out the best in people and create a state of overall goodness and wellbeing – in cosmos, nature, society and the human body”.³⁶²

In the ancient Daoist tradition, which is considered to predate the *Daodejing*, the “Book of the Way and Its Power (or Tao-given quality of a thing)”,³⁶³ the Dao meant a “way” or “method”, but its meaning was widened in this famous text where it was first presented as “Ultimate Truth”, “one and transcendent”, “invisible, inaudible, imperceptible”.³⁶⁴ The Dao is ineffable, beyond conceptualisation and indefinable in words, but it is depicted in the *Daodejing* as having two aspects: it is at once that which “underlines or governs the life of the universe”,³⁶⁵ and the creative power which existed before the “advent of heaven and earth”.³⁶⁶

The creative power is linked to the idea of the universe “constantly re-creating itself in a continuing evolution (one of its names is the ‘ten thousand transformations’)”. This process is the continual emanation of the “Primordial Breath, or Energy (*Yuanqi*), which is neither material nor spirit”. Such *ki* is “a force that expands and animates the world in a turning motion”.³⁶⁷ It both “gives

³⁶¹ Russell Kirkland, *Varieties of Taoism in Ancient China: A Preliminary Comparison of Themes in the Nei Yeh and Other Taoist Classics* [Electronic article] (1997[accessed on 2003]), available from http://helios.unive.it/~pregadio/taoism/taoism_essays.html.

³⁶² Kohn, *Daoism*, 4.

³⁶³ Robinet, *Taoism*, 26.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Smart, *World Philosophies*, 68.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 69.

³⁶⁷ Robinet, *Taoism*, 7.

form to (*zao*) and transforms (*hua*) everything". Its transformations are a never-ending creation and as such the "only constant reality".³⁶⁸

This image of the creative emanation of the Dao is so close to Ueshiba's world view that it is remarkable that so few *aikidōka* have mentioned it. As illustrated in the following verse, Ueshiba saw the cosmos as similarly permeated by an all-pervasive, constantly transforming creative force:

This world is built up.
Of living life (*iki-inochi*)
of the breath of life (*iki-inochi*)
and of the saving power of the Universal (*iki-inochi*).
All spinning and flourishing...³⁶⁹

The image of the Dao as underlying principle is also present in Ueshiba's discourse, for he spoke of the universe as having order and shape, "structure (*shikumi*)",³⁷⁰ and an inherent principle. *Aikidō*, he said, was in accord with the "Way of the principle of the eternal, unchanging system of the Universe".³⁷¹ This was "the principle of eternal continuation throughout all ages of the one and same system of the Universe".³⁷²

The idea of permutating *ki* that "gives form to" and "transforms" everything is also found in his explanations of *aikidō*. Analysis of his thought reveals an understanding of *ki* as responsible both for giving shape to the phenomenal world and for dissolving that shape. This idea, which recalls the Buddhist notion that form is "empty", is found, for instance, in Ueshiba's allusions to the "world of appearances".³⁷³

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 8.

³⁶⁹ Ueshiba Morihei, "Mysteries Aikido Okugi (Doka)," 10.

³⁷⁰ Ueshiba Morihei, "Songs of the Way (3)," ed. Abe Seiseki, *Aikido Journal*, no. 115 (1998): 38.

³⁷¹ Ueshiba Morihei, "Takemusu aiki 2," 43.

³⁷² Ueshiba Morihei, "Takemusu aiki 1," 28.

³⁷³ Ueshiba Morihei, "Mysteries Aikido Okugi (Doka)," 6.

In Daoist thought, the notion of *ki* is inseparable from that of the bipolar theory of *yin* and *yang*, conceived of as closely correlated, dynamic universal principles whose constantly “moving oscillation” in the relative world testifies to the “basic Oneness that underlies the world”.³⁷⁴ Most observers would probably agree that the movements of Ueshiba’s *aikidō*, based on a dynamic turning motion engaging practitioners in a balancing of ebb and flow, simulate the *yin-yang* flux and provide a powerful symbol of unity. Cauhépé and Kuang have suggested that it is this emphasis on circular and spiralic forms, a direct result of dependence on *yin* and *yang*, which is one of *aikidō*’s most distinctive features: “For any evolved practitioner, the movements derive from the alternation of *yin* and *yang*, which gives them a form which is circular, spiralic or in figure of eight.”³⁷⁵ An example of *aikidō* as a living symbol of *yin* and *yang* is provided in Saotome’s sketch of the technique known as *koshinage* (see Appendix 3, page 68).

While some might consider this as no more than combat strategy of feint and riposte, a more considered view (in the light of Ueshiba’s descriptions) is that *aikidō*’s spiralic, girating, fluid movements are patterned on the Daoist vision of the activity of *ki* as a continually evolving animating force whose forms are evanescent yet obey a unifying dynamic principle:

The *aikidō* of the sage, Ueshiba, like Tai ch’i chuan, is an application of the form of the T’ai-ki principle. The movements inherent to these two disciplines are mental and physical applications of the forms generated by this “First principle”.³⁷⁶

The significance of apprehension of *ki* and *yin-yang* for *aikidō* as spiritual practice cannot, in the view of this author, be overestimated, for it is what makes the difference between *aikidō* as physical exercise (that is, understanding body movement according to the Cartesian paradigm) and its

³⁷⁴ Robinet, *Taoism*, 10.

³⁷⁵ Cauhépé and Kuang, *Les Arts martiaux intériorisés*, 156.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 147.

practice as spiritual pursuit. An indication of how techniques are practised differently according to the adept's understanding of *ki* is given by Gleason:

Aikido techniques are designed to be ineffective until one has grasped the essence of expansive spiral motion and proper use of *ki* or internal power. They cannot therefore be effectively used in the same manner as jujutsu techniques, which depend largely on contracting motion for the purpose of breaking the partner's joints.³⁷⁷

Daoism and *aikidō*: principles of spiritual practice

The aim of Daoist spiritual practices naturally derives from the Daoist view of enlightenment which Daniel Odier describes as intimately connected with the idea of a “fusion of individual consciousness in the flux of [cosmic] changes”.³⁷⁸ This is complete unity with the Dao which is beyond “discursive reasoning”, requiring a “silence of mind” and “non-action”.³⁷⁹

Realisation of the Dao is thus direct experience of the underlying unity of the cosmos. For this state of unity to be achieved, various prescriptions are offered. Most fundamental is the practice of *wu wei*, often translated “non-intervention” (in the natural operation of the Universe). The idea thus becomes to reach the Dao by letting truth “operate naturally”,³⁸⁰ an idea shared also by Zen Buddhism:

Non-action does not mean that the ascetic does nothing; it only means that there is no tie between himself and action, and there is no desire, no ownership, no expectation of any result. The act is born in necessity and falls again into forgetfulness. It is an

³⁷⁷ William Gleason, *Sword and Aikido* [Electronic newsletter] (Shobu Aikido Aiki News, 2001[accessed on 2003]), available from <http://www.shobu.org/newsletters/2-2/gleason.htm>.

³⁷⁸ Daniel Odier, *Meditation Techniques of the Buddhist and Taoist Masters*, trans. John Mahoney, 2nd ed. (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2003), 163.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

³⁸⁰ Robinet, *Taoism*, 28.

absolutely pure and spontaneous spouting that is the manifestation of emptiness.³⁸¹

It is interesting that these are precisely the characteristics that some *aikidōka* have noted in relation to Ueshiba's performance of *aikidō* technique:

It is this "non-action", totally different from passivity, in the sense that an act of will does not interfere, that could be observed in the movements of the late Master Ueshiba.³⁸²

Wu wei is related to the "changing equilibrium" of universal movement contained in the theory of *yin-yang* and the five elements,³⁸³ for it is by sensitivity to their principles that the Daoist adept can align with natural forces and act in accordance with them, rather than counter to them. Response must be perfectly natural and unhindered, as explained in an ancient Daoistic text examined by Harold Roth, the *Hsin-shu shang* ("The Techniques of the Mind", Part I) in which *wu wei* is linked to the notion of spontaneous response (*ying*), adaptation (*yin*) and compliance with natural guidelines (*hsun-li*).³⁸⁴

Providing an example of how the modality of the body helps to transform the mind, *wu wei* assumes in *aikidō* the form of both mental and physical non-resistance. While the casual observer might assume, for instance, that the basic *aikidō* movement *taisabaki* (a pivoting body turn) is merely an evasive physical manoeuvre aimed at avoiding direct clash with an attacker's force, actual experience reveals it to be also a subtle mental exercise in non-interference. This congruence of body and mind explains why Ueshiba's own performance in his later years appeared so unsystematic, for it was a constant application of *wu wei*,

³⁸¹ Odier, *Meditation Techniques*, 166-67.

³⁸² Cauhépé and Kuang, *Les Arts martiaux intérieurs*, 161.

³⁸³ Robinet, *Taoism*, 11.

³⁸⁴ Harold D. Roth, "Psychology and Self-Cultivation in Early Taoistic Thought," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51, no. 2 (1991): 621.

where every technique was a spontaneous merging with a rhythmic impulse. That *wu wei*, in the sense of total conformity to natural forces, was Ueshiba's intent is expressed clearly in his statement that: "True budo is to become one with the universe".³⁸⁵

The practice of *wu wei* is intimately connected to sensitivity to the oscillation of *yin* and *yang*. *Wu wei* here does not mean, as it is often interpreted in the West, passivity, but rather a response appropriate to restore order and balance. By this practice, the mind of the Daoist adept comes to apprehend the underlying unity behind phenomena. Those *aikidōka* who have written about the relationship of *yin* and *yang* in *aikidō* movement describe it in similar terms:

The fundamental idea of aikido in the art of combat is that everything is essentially One, and that beyond their appearance of dualism and opposition, attack and defence are only parts and moments of a much more fluid and coherent reality.³⁸⁶

Protin sees the movements of *aikidō* technique as echoing this cosmic interplay in a number of ways:

Aikido reproduces in its science of combat for peace, beyond all appearances, the continual oscillation of *yin* and *yang*, which cannot be substituted for each other. This principle is found in the sphericity of its movements where *yin* and *yang* attitudes succeed each other constantly, alternating and combining in complementary fashion, in the form of forward, centripetal expanding motion (*Irimi/Omoto/Positive*) or circular, centrifugal, contracting motion.³⁸⁷

The reflection of *yin* and *yang* motion in *aikidō* has also been observed by Saotome in the correlation of *aikidō* techniques with planetary motion or

³⁸⁵ Ueshiba Morihei, "Excerpts from the Writings," 7.

³⁸⁶ Protin, *Aikido un art martial*, 180.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

other natural forms.³⁸⁸ Performance of movements which conform to natural laws can be described as an application of *wu wei* which gradually transforms the practitioner's internal vision.

According to Robinet, the Daoist assumption is that practice of accordance with the laws of *yin* and *yang* leads to the understanding expressed in the *Daodejing* that "thought based on oppositions cannot arrive at Ultimate Truth, which is One". In other words, thought is "by nature dualistic" and because of this cannot reach Ultimate Truth, a deduction which led to the Daoist emphasis on cessation of thought as a prerequisite for apprehension of reality.³⁸⁹ Similarly, in *aikidō* performance, the attempt to maintain fluidity of motion reveals the sources of mental hindrance which the practitioner can then remove by continued practice.

The theories of *wu wei* and *yin-yang* are intimately connected to the concept of *ki* and the Daoist view of the human person as a field of *ki* interacting with universal *ki*. In order for truth to be grasped, the human person must aim for a "natural" state, that is perfect *wu wei*, a condition in which the flow of *ki* between individual and universe is unhindered. In this scheme, *ki* is seen as having natural routes through the human body which must be unobstructed if the microcosmic/macrocosmic boundary is to be dissolved. Here can be found a marked correlation with Ueshiba's idea of *aikidō* practice as being to "align and harmonize the self".³⁹⁰

In the Daoist understanding, the microcosmic/macrocosmic connection is broken by egotistic tendencies which obstruct the flow of *ki*. In Daoist methods for removing such hindrances, purification of body and mind is thus associated

³⁸⁸ For examples of how *aikidō* movements follow natural forms such as planetary orbits or wave motion, see Saotome Mitsugi, *Aikido and the Harmony of Nature* (Boston, Mass.: Shambhala, 1993), 24 and 44.

³⁸⁹ Robinet, *Taoism*, 28.

³⁹⁰ See Abe Seiseki's commentary on Ueshiba's poetry in Ueshiba Morihei, "O-Sensei's Songs of the Way (5)," ed. Abe Seiseki, *Aikido Journal* no. 117, 1999: 40.

with the free circulation of *ki*. A range of purification techniques were developed in particular by the Daoist alchemists, who used both internal and external methods for achieving transformation of "the physiological structure and functions of the body".³⁹¹ Externally, this was done by ingesting minerals and herbs, while internally it was effected by a variety of psycho-physical methods, including visualisation of symbols and repetitive cyclical processes. For comparison with *aikidō*, it is the techniques of this Inner Alchemy that are of interest for a similarity is already suggested in Ueshiba's insistence that *aikidō* practice was *misogi* (purification).

The Daoist techniques are now considered to be of extremely ancient origin and were described in an ancient text "long-overlooked in Asia and the West alike", the *Nei yeh* ("Inner Cultivation") preserved in the *Kuan-tzu*,³⁹² which represents an ancient tradition now held to have influenced the *Daodejing*. The exercises described there prefigure the self-cultivational techniques of the Interior Alchemy schools which emerged much later under the Tang (618-906) and Song dynasties (960-1279).

Roth's analysis of these early Daoistic texts is particularly helpful in demonstrating that the main purpose of the "mental and physical techniques of self-discipline" described there was to achieve "immediate experience of the Tao".³⁹³ Kohn makes a similar claim in her study of the meanings of the later Daoist meditative technique of "Guarding the One", where "the One" stands for "primordial energy" and "becoming one with it means to enter into the formlessness of universal creation".³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ Eva Wong, *The Shambhala Guide to Taoism* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1997), 66.

³⁹² Russell Kirkland, *The Taoist Tradition: A Historical Outline* (2003 [accessed on 2003]), available from <http://www.uga.edu/religion/rk/basehtml/guides/TMGID.html>.

³⁹³ Roth, "Psychology and Self-Cultivation," 607.

³⁹⁴ Livia Kohn, "Guarding the One," in *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, ed. Livia Kohn and Yoshinobu Sakade, *Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies Vol. 61* (Ann Arbor: Centre for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1989), 133.

The founding assumption of these techniques is that physiological conditions can affect meditative experience,³⁹⁵ and that the appropriate physiological conditions are attained by means of the generation or manipulation of “the vital energy (*ch'i*), the vital essence (*ching*), and the numen (*shen*)”.³⁹⁶ It should be noted that Ueshiba made similar reference to the need to refine different types of *ki*, although his system may have been slightly different from the Daoist one.³⁹⁷ In this regard, therefore, the process used by the Daoists can shed light on how *aikidō* might operate as spiritual exercise.

Describing these processes, Yuasa quotes the sinologist, Erwin Rousselle, as having suggested that *shen* (*shin* in Japanese) represented “spiritual power”, *ki* “life power” and *ching* (*sei*) “power for procreation”. In a process which recalls the Hatha yogic methods referred to earlier, the Daoist adept first controls the flow of *ki* through meditation and breathing exercises. Next, *ki* is applied to sublimate the flow of *sei*, which in turn transforms into a “spiritually subtle flow of *shin*”.³⁹⁸ As in many other traditions, the Daoist methods involve a number of “spiralling” stages through which the adept passes, all of which require ever-subtler appreciation of dual elements and their ultimate fusion, the last of which is the union of the practitioner’s *shen* with the Dao.³⁹⁹

The first step in this Daoist process, that of nurturing *ki* within the human person, was achieved by a correct balancing of emotions through application of the laws of *yin* and *yang* and their further differentiation in the permutations of the five elements. This in turn depended on the ancient Chinese understanding of

³⁹⁵ Roth, “Psychology and Self-Cultivation,” 603.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ See Abe Seiseki’s commentary on the expression “pine, bamboo, and plum” (*sho chiku bai*) used to describe different types of *ki* in Ueshiba’s poetry, in Ueshiba Morihei, “O-Sensei’s Songs of the Way (4),” 46.

³⁹⁸ Yuasa, *The Body, Self-Cultivation, and Ki Energy*, 78.

³⁹⁹ Robinet, *Taoism*, 247.

the internal organs as “systems of vital energy”⁴⁰⁰ intimately related to the energies of the cosmos. The understanding was that the three energies are “dissipated” through unbalanced emotion and excessive thinking and need to be “recovered” for inner transformation to take place.⁴⁰¹ The purpose becomes to cultivate the *ki* in order that the *shin*, representing the opening to higher levels of meditation, can be activated. It can also be noted in passing that this theory has close correlations with the Shingon *Mikkyō* practices to visualise and sublimate energies, and with the Shintō theory of *kotodama*.

According to the Daoist interpretation of five-element theory, the internal organs are related to the five elements and must be in balance for *ki* to circulate freely.⁴⁰² Like many Daoist exercises, *aikidō* movements, executed with the right understanding, also have the effect of establishing correct equilibrium within the body, from whence springs stabilisation of the emotions which enables concentration of *ki*. The relation of some *aikidō* techniques to the *ki* of the internal organs is described here by a French *aikidōka* André Cognard (the names of techniques are in italics):

Thus, while *ikkyo* disperses the energy of the intestines, *iriminage* concentrates it. While *nikkyo* disperses the energy of the liver, *shihonage* concentrates it. While *sankyo* disperses the energy of the lungs, *tenchinage* concentrates it. While *yonkyo* disperses the energy of the stomach, *kotegaeshi* concentrates it.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰⁰ Roth, "Psychology and Self-Cultivation," 600, n. 2.

⁴⁰¹ Wong, *The Shambhala Guide to Taoism*, 173.

⁴⁰² See the geometrical divisions of the body described in Cauhépé and Kuang, *Les Arts martiaux intérieurs*, 215-17.

⁴⁰³ André Cognard, "Civilisation et arts martiaux ou le noeud de la ceinture," *Questions de - Albin Michel*, no. 102 (1995): 42.

Another feature of this equilibrium in the practice of *aikidō* is that the resultant harmonised *ki* produces beneficial effects for oneself and others, as the French *aikidōka* André Nocquet⁴⁰⁴ observes:

The satisfaction that he [the practitioner] experiences from his internal equilibrium radiates on the outside and has a beneficial effect on others.⁴⁰⁵

Among the meditation techniques of the Inner Alchemists are visualisations, in coordination with breathing, of the circulation of *ki* in and around the human body in “orbits”. In a way which strongly recalls these techniques, execution of *aikidō* requires coordination of body motion with breathing and visualisation of orbital movement. The following excerpt from Ueshiba’s lectures suggests a similarity with the alchemist approach:

Thus, when performing your duty as a human being, you form a circle as you breathe out through prayer, and a square as you breathe in. Then, you let the marvelous spirit of the Universe move around inside your whole body and purify your six senses (*rokkon*) allowing them to operate.⁴⁰⁶

In the Daoist techniques, *ki* in the body is associated with “fields” (the *Tan-t’iens*),⁴⁰⁷ which have been compared to the concept of the *cakras*⁴⁰⁸ in yoga. In Daoism, the first stage of transformation of *ki* takes place in the lower field (roughly two inches below the navel) where generative energy is gathered

⁴⁰⁴ André Nocquet (1914-1999) was one of the first French *aikidō* practitioners. He trained in France with Mochizuki Minori and Abe Tadashi, and later in Japan with Ueshiba Morihei from 1955-1957. See Bonnefond and Clériot, *Histoire de l'aikido*, 237.

⁴⁰⁵ André Nocquet, *Maître Morihei Ueshiba présence et message* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1987), 265.

⁴⁰⁶ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 2,” 45.

⁴⁰⁷ *Tan-t’ien* (meaning “cinnabar fields” in Chinese) are three regions of the human body (in the brain, the heart and below the navel) through which the vital energy flows. See Schuhmacher and Woerner (eds.), *The Rider Encyclopedia*, 354-55.

⁴⁰⁸ *Cakra* (meaning “wheel” or “circle” in Sanskrit) is a term used to designate centres of energy in the human energy body (the astral body). In the Indian kundalinī yoga system there are seven *cakras*.

and “transmuted into vital, or breath, energy”. This is the transmutation of *ching* to *qi* and begins with a *yang* action, a “gathering of the spark of eternal Yang found in the depths of man”.⁴⁰⁹ The importance of stabilising body and mind at this location, known as the *tanden* (or *hara*) in the martial arts, is well known in Japanese culture as the basis of all the Japanese arts of *haragei*.⁴¹⁰ While many martial arts might see control of *hara* as the culmination of practice, Daoism, which uses the image of “cauldron” or “furnace” for the *tanden*, makes it clear that this is only the start of the process of transmutation, as the opening of the first of the seven *cakras* would be in yoga.

In agreement with Cauhépe and Kuang, who may have been the first to suggest the idea, it is proposed here that Ueshiba’s development of *aikidō* was close to the Daoist model, a technique facilitating concentration of *ki* and its transmutation to *shin* as has been described.⁴¹¹ Evidence for this is provided by Ueshiba’s frequent references to Daoist metaphors for harnessing, strengthening and transmuting *ki* in the human body. For instance, his remark that “martial art techniques are born when the Breath of Heaven and Earth are united” recalls the image used in Daoist yoga to describe the circuit of macrocosmic energy, which, if stored in the human body through maintenance of proper internal balance, can assist the meditation process:

This energy comes down from the heavens, passes through all Yang things, with a centripetal circular motion, and enters the earth, where it gathers further vitality. It then returns to heaven, passing through all Yin things, with a centrifugal circular action.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁹ Robinet, *Taoism*, 246.

⁴¹⁰ “The art of concentrating one’s thought, mind and energy in the Hara”. See Frédéric, *A Dictionary of the Martial Arts*, 46.

⁴¹¹ Cauhépe and Kuang, *Les Arts martiaux intérieurs*, 240.

⁴¹² Chee Soo, *Taoist Yoga the Chinese Art of K'ai Men*, Revised ed. (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1983), 17.

This is not to say that breathing methods used in *aikidō* are identical with the Daoist systems. Warcollier, for example, has noted that, unlike the Daoist exercises, breathing technique in *aikidō* does not require concentration on inhalation and retention of breath (the *yin* phase), but rather emphasis on exhalation (the *yang* phase), either prolonged in coordination with the turning motion of “negative” techniques, or swift and decisive as in forward motion, such as *irimi*.⁴¹³

Nevertheless, the role of *aikidō* practice in transmuting *ki* is clearly indicated in Ueshiba’s discourse and this research suggests, again with Cauhépé and Kuang, that his frequent substitution of the Chinese character *ai* (愛) meaning “love” in place of the Chinese character for *ai* (合) meaning “harmony”,⁴¹⁴ indicated his understanding of the displacement of *ki* needed to open the heart *cakra*. This shift of focus would firmly position *aikidō* as a spiritual exercise and could be seen as a main point of contrast with martial arts’ practice based on conflict.

⁴¹³ Pierre Warcollier, *Aikido l'esprit de ses techniques et l'expérience spirituelle de Maître Ueshiba son créateur* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1996), 131-32.

⁴¹⁴ See, for example, the use of these two Chinese characters in juxtaposition in a verse by Ueshiba quoted in Ueshiba Morihei, *The Essence of Aikido*, 51.

Chapter Four: Zen Buddhism and aikidō –

“Emptiness” and Buddha-nature

Of all forms of religion in Japan, Zen Buddhism is most associated with the Japanese martial arts in the Western mind. The relationship of Zen Buddhism to the martial arts is, however, a contentious issue, obscured by much misunderstanding. As these misapprehensions have coloured perceptions of the relationship between *aikidō* and Zen, some consideration will be given here to the wider context in order that the relationship between *aikidō* and Zen may be better understood.

Ueshiba and Zen Buddhism

Because references to Zen concepts in Ueshiba's lectures and writings are less frequent than allusions to Shintō mythology or the recognisable motifs of Shingon *Mikkyō*, one of Ueshiba's biographers concluded that Ueshiba was not interested in Zen, and that “aikido as conceived by Morihei reflects a world view that has almost nothing in common with Zen in particular or Buddhism in general”.⁴¹⁵

This is doubtful, however, if only because, as a result of centuries of interaction, Shintō and Japanese interpretations of Mahāyāna Buddhism, to which Zen belongs, have come to share many core concepts. For example, the concept of “being-time” (*uji*),⁴¹⁶ developed by Dōgen Kigen (1200-1253), founder of the Japanese Sōtō Zen sect, is considered to have been influenced by the Shintō idea of *naka-ima*.⁴¹⁷ Both religions see ultimate reality as non-dual (that is as beyond the duality of subject and object), and have the notion of

⁴¹⁵ Stevens, *Abundant Peace*, 97.

⁴¹⁶ Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, ed. James W Heisig, trans. James W Heisig and Paul Knitter, 2 vols., vol. 2 Japan, *Nanzan Studies in Religion and Culture* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990), 87-91.

⁴¹⁷ *Naka-ima* is the “middle-now”, the “eternal present”. See Herbert, *Shinto*, 32.

humankind's pure inherent nature which needs to be recovered by diligent ascetic practice.

It would indeed be difficult to believe that Ueshiba, who avidly sought martial arts' experience in many schools (some of which, such as Yagyū-ryū, integrated the Zen approach in their training methods), and had part of his childhood education in a Zen temple, was unaware of Zen in its relation to the martial arts. Although, during Ueshiba's early life at least, Buddhism's authority was in decline because of state policies, a fact which may conceivably have reduced the opportunity to pursue a spiritual path through Buddhism, the Zen approach to life was so much intertwined with the martial arts' ethos that it would have been difficult for him to ignore it entirely.

Nevertheless, contrary to a widely held misapprehension that Ueshiba actively pursued Zen practice, he never belonged to a Zen sect. On the other hand, there is no evidence to show, as suggested by Cauhépé, that Ueshiba deliberately eschewed Zen because of its association with *bushidō* and Japanese nationalism.⁴¹⁸ It contrasts, for instance, with Nocquet's claim, in a little known pamphlet, that Ueshiba spoke at length to him about the link between Zen practice and *aiki*.⁴¹⁹

There is no reason to doubt Nocquet's assertion, particularly as Ueshiba's son, Kisshōmaru, acknowledged that his father, although not a follower of Zen, had deep respect for serious Zen study.⁴²⁰ A telling indicator of Zen influence on Ueshiba's attitude, too, is that he often expressed himself through calligraphy, one of the artistic modes typical of Zen (see example of Ueshiba's calligraphy in Appendix 2, Figure 3, page 168). Evidence from Ueshiba's lectures and writings shows that he was certainly aware of Buddhist

⁴¹⁸ Cauhépé and Kuang, *Les arts martiaux intériorisés*, 52.

⁴¹⁹ Nocquet, *Zen et aiki*.

⁴²⁰ Ueshiba, *Aikido Kaiso Ueshiba Morihei Den*.

metaphysics although to what extent this was through the eyes of the Zen school rather than, say, Shingon *Mikkyō*, is difficult to ascertain. The Buddhist theme of “Emptiness” (*sūnyatā* in Sanskrit; *kū* in Japanese) is apparent, for instance, in the following:

The Great Emptiness was born from Kuu (Mu) in which everything exists and nothing exists at the same time. (What I call Mu is not Nothingness. It is the world without any object, but only light everywhere. Our world was born and grew from this Mu). However, even saints and sages cannot find a word to speak about it. It is very difficult to explain...⁴²¹

Similarly, although the vocabulary of Zen may not be dominant in Ueshiba’s lectures and writings, they contain significant allusion to Zen themes, such as those of non-attachment and the relativity of concepts. “*Aikidō*”, he said, “instructs us to give up all kinds of attachments, and not to consider the matter of good and evil as a problem since it is only relative.”⁴²²

There are thus sufficient grounds for believing that Zen and *aikidō* may have common features, and that on sound evidence the renowned authority on Zen Buddhism, Shimizu Kenji, and his co-author Kamata Shigeo, could equate the function of *aikidō* with Zen practice:

Zazen is one form, but Zen can create an infinity of forms. I believe that one of these forms is aikido. Aikido is an art in which the normally invisible mind of Zen is wonderfully expressed by the body. Aikido expresses “nothingness,” which is never disturbed by anything, in the form of the movement of ki.⁴²³

Zen in the martial arts: fact or fantasy?

Before considering in more depth the evidence for a relationship between *aikidō* and Zen, the contentions (both overt and implicit) of some contemporary

⁴²¹ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 1,” 35.

⁴²² Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 4,” 74.

⁴²³ Kamata and Shimizu, *Zen to aikidō*, 125.

scholars that the link between Zen and the modern martial arts is spurious must be answered. Some scholars object to the idea of Zen spirituality in the martial arts on the grounds that so-called Zen in the modern martial arts is an invention connected with the creation of a mythical *bushidō* in Japan in the early twentieth century. Others argue that the samurai's historically recognised embrace of Zen, held to be the source of any Zen content in the modern martial arts, was motivated by utilitarian rather than spiritual concern, and that this is evidenced by the perceived disjunction between Zen ethics and the objectives of the exercise of the samurai profession.

John P. Keenan, for example, irritated by modern martial artists' indiscriminating references to Zen in the martial arts, expressed the wish that they would stop "talking about martial arts in mystic terms, as if skill at karate involved spiritual attainment".⁴²⁴ Another example of scholarly scepticism about Zen in the modern martial arts is Yamada Shōji's deconstruction of Eugen Herrigel's⁴²⁵ claimed experience of Zen enlightenment in the practice of *kyūdō*, Japanese archery.⁴²⁶ Cameron Hurst III, meanwhile, argues that "just because martial arts texts contain Zen Buddhist and other religious references, one should not assume that practitioners were religiously motivated".⁴²⁷ The Zen scholar and practitioner Robert Linssen, too, considered the supposed application of Zen Buddhist metaphysics in the arts of the samurai as a distortion of true Zen, a

⁴²⁴ John P. Keenan, "Spontaneity in Western Martial Arts - a Yogacara Critique of *Mushin* (No-Mind)," in *United States-Japan Conference on Japanese Martial Arts and American Sports Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Means to Personal Growth*, ed. Kiyota Minoru and Kinoshita Hideaki (Tokyo: Nihon University, 1990), 40.

⁴²⁵ Eugen Herrigel (1884-1955) was a German professor of philosophy who practised *kyūdō* in Japan under the instructor Awa Kenzō (1880-1939). Herrigel published a book in 1948 entitled *Zen in der Kunst des Bogenschiessens* (*Zen in the Art of Archery*) which has since been translated into several languages and became a bestseller on Japanese culture.

⁴²⁶ Shōji Yamada, "The Myth of Zen in the Art of Archery," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 28, no. 1-2 (2001): 1-30.

⁴²⁷ Cameron Hurst III, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan*, 193.

“subtle and skilful betrayal”⁴²⁸ of Zen tenets, and that this misunderstanding has been perpetuated in the modern martial arts.

As is well known by scholars (but less so by the general reader, especially in the West),⁴²⁹ Japanese Zen⁴³⁰ is derived from Chinese Ch’an, a Mahāyāna Buddhist school founded in China which developed a “purely experiential form of Buddhism, which did away with the elaborations of doctrine, rituals, merit-working, and other paraphernalia of religion”.⁴³¹ The name “Ch’an” (the Chinese word for the Sanskrit *dhyāna*, meaning “meditation”) describes a method (or methods) of Buddhist spiritual practice derived from an interpretation of the Buddha’s enlightenment as a “sudden breakthrough”,⁴³² and from the account of the direct transmission of knowledge, not dependent “upon words and letters” from the Buddha Śākyamuni to his disciple Kāśyapa.⁴³³

According to tradition, the Ch’an teaching was first brought from India to Canton in 520 AD by the Indian monk Bodhidharma, although there are doubts about whether this is historically accurate. The teaching was handed on in succession to various Chinese patriarchs, of whom the most famous was Hui-neng (637-713), seen as the originator of a “definitely Chinese form of Ch’an”. After his death, the Ch’an teaching developed along several different lines, the two principal remaining schools today being Lin-chi and Ts’ao-tung (Rinzai and Sōtō in Japanese).⁴³⁴ Zen’s introduction to Japan is traditionally attributed to the

⁴²⁸ Robert Linssen cited in Protin, *Aikido un art martial*, 43.

⁴²⁹ Nan Huai-Chin, for example, laments modern images of Zen which neglect its Chinese origins and has listed six contemporary misunderstandings about it. See Nan Huai-chin, *The Story of Chinese Zen*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Rutland, Vt. and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1995), 64-68.

⁴³⁰ Zen is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese word Ch’an.

⁴³¹ Smart, *World Philosophies*, 83.

⁴³² Dumoulin, *Zen Enlightenment*, 15.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴³⁴ Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, 1977 reprint ed. (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co, 1982), 233.

monk Myōan Eisai (1141-1215),⁴³⁵ although it was known in Japan to some extent before him. Following its adoption by the Hōjō regents,⁴³⁶ Zen became the religion of Japan's ruling class and remained one of the predominant religions throughout the Tokugawa period, having particular attraction for the samurai.

Zen's emphasis on experience, on spirituality as apprehended by the body and mind in its entirety, became the source of the link between Zen and the arts. Although Zen was only one of several religico-philosophical systems adopted by the samurai (others being, for instance, Shingon *Mikkyō*, Confucianism, Pure Land Buddhism and Shintō), it is seen to have had special appeal for them because of its experiential rather than discursive approach to metaphysics, emphasis on self-discipline in spiritual training, and aspects of its meditation method which increased mental and physical stability and coordination, as well as the ability to eliminate distracting thoughts.

However, this author agrees with King and others, that the motivation of Japan's political leaders in sending samurai to Zen monasteries was not likely to have been to produce Buddhist saints but rather to enhance their fighting qualities.⁴³⁷ The same assessment could equally be made of the aims of the Japanese government in extolling the Zen "values" of equanimity and selflessness in the face of death as part of the re-invented *bushidō* in 1930s Japanese military ideology.⁴³⁸ In both instances, Zen practice was oriented towards political goals rather than any transcendent search for ultimate truth, and

⁴³⁵ Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism*, 14.

⁴³⁶ The fourth Hōjō regent, Hōjō Tokiyori (1227-1263) was the first to become "personally interested in Zen practice". Later Hōjō regents, including several Ashikaga shoguns, were "generous patrons of Zen" which under their patronage became a "nationwide establishment". See King, *Zen and the Way of the Sword*, 29.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 178.

⁴³⁸ See the description of "Imperial-State Zen" and "Soldier Zen" (*gunjin Zen*) in Brian (Daizen) A. Victoria, *Zen at War* (New York: Weatherhill, 1997), 95-129.



its effectiveness as means of spiritual development can legitimately be questioned.

On the other hand, it need not be deduced from this that there was absolutely no connection between true Zen spirituality and martial arts' practice. This is a domain where careful differentiation is needed and a digression to explore the origins of modern ideas about Zen in the martial arts will be helpful.

"Suzuki Zen" and Takuan Sōhō

The debate about Zen spirituality in the martial arts tends to revolve around the notion of "no-mind" (*mushin*), a state of being in which discursive thought stops and which represents the ideal of Zen meditation practice. The contemporary conviction of a link between the Zen experience of *mushin* and martial arts' practice, in the West at least, derives mainly from the writings of the Zen scholar and prolific author Suzuki Daisetsu,⁴³⁹ who has greatly influenced ideas of Zen in the West. His influence on Western martial artists derives from the publication, in 1959, coincident with the rapid expansion of Japanese martial arts in the West, of his classic work *Zen and Japanese Culture*,⁴⁴⁰ which includes three chapters on Zen, swordsmanship and the samurai. In particular, the book reproduces, with commentary, two texts on Zen and swordsmanship by the Rinzai Zen monk Takuan Sōhō (1573-1645): a letter to the sword master Yagyū Munenori (1571-1646) entitled *Fudōchi-shinmyōroku* (*Letter to Yagyū Tajima no Kami Munenori on the mystery of PrajñāImmovable*)⁴⁴¹ and *Taiaki* (*The*

⁴³⁹ Suzuki Daisetsu was a disciple of Kōgaku Sōen (1859-1919), the abbot of the Engaku-ji Zen monastery in Kamakura. At a time when Zen was scarcely known outside East Asia, Suzuki was asked to translate into English the manuscript of a talk given by Sōen at the famous World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. He was subsequently recommended to work with the publisher and philosopher of religion Paul Carus (1852-1919) on publication of research on East Asian religions. He worked with the Carus Publishing House for ten years during which he acquired the knowledge to write effectively on Zen Buddhism for the West. Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism*, 416-17.

⁴⁴⁰ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, Paperback ed. 1993 reprint, vol. LXIV, *Bollingen Series LXIV* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959).

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 95-113.

Sword of Taia).⁴⁴² As a result of their popularisation in Suzuki's book, Takuan's two texts became widely known among martial artists in the West and are often cited in general works on the martial arts, including books by *aikidōka*.⁴⁴³

In these texts, Takuan describes the practice of swordsmanship in terms of the state of "no-mind" and some martial artists have since taken Takuan's exposition literally. Cameron Hurst III attempts to discount Takuan's view by arguing that his writings were an isolated case and that he was not well known in his day.⁴⁴⁴ However, this argument is unconvincing for it is a historical fact that Takuan was a respected Zen monk of wide learning⁴⁴⁵ who could be assumed to have profound knowledge of his subject. Nor was he the only exponent of this idea; the *Heihō Kaden Sho* (Family-Transmitted Book on Swordsmanship),⁴⁴⁶ completed in 1632, which contains the observations of three swordsmen, including the famed Yagyū Munenori (1571-1646), draws similar parallels between Zen and swordsmanship.

A more nuanced argument than outright denial of Takuan's teaching is Dennis Lishka's view that Takuan was speaking metaphorically, in language that would have been familiar to the samurai, in order to convey understanding of a state of mind that cannot easily be described theoretically. Takuan did not mean to imply, he suggests, that apprehension of *mushin* was an inevitable consequence of martial arts' practice, but that the state of no-mind was similar to

⁴⁴² Ibid., 166-68.

⁴⁴³ See, for example, reference to Takuan's writings in Greslé, *Réflexions sur l'aikido*, 85.

⁴⁴⁴ Cameron Hurst III, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan*, 75.

⁴⁴⁵ See biographical details in Hirose Nobuko (compiled and ed.), *Immovable Wisdom the Art of Zen Strategy the Teachings of Takuan Soho* (Shaftesbury: Element Books, 1992), 1-15.

⁴⁴⁶ Hiroaki Sato (trans.), *The Sword & the Mind* (Woodstock, N.Y.: The Overlook Press, 1986), 21-109.

the state of awareness required to practice swordsmanship in the way he described.⁴⁴⁷

Keenan suggested that Takuan's portrayal of swordsmanship, and modern martial artists' interpretation of it, resulted in a form of martial arts' practice which was "only tenuously aware of the need for compassion".⁴⁴⁸ In his response, McFarlane, however, remarked that Keenan was relying too heavily on the exposition of Takuan's work by Suzuki which was skewed by the latter's own view of Zen,⁴⁴⁹ now considered highly selective and as having led to "widely divergent interpretations in the West",⁴⁵⁰ where, by the time of the publication of *Zen and Japanese Culture*, misunderstanding about Zen was already widespread.⁴⁵¹

Because of the pervasive influence of Suzuki's writings on perceptions of Zen in the martial arts, it is worth noting some of the biases in his presentation. He tended, for example, to minimise the Indo-Chinese roots of Zen,⁴⁵² so dissociating Zen from both the Indian yogic practices in which it had its origins, and Chinese thought, especially Daoism, which influenced Ch'an during its long maturation in China. In addition, Suzuki wrote from the viewpoint of Rinzai Zen, which has sometimes more severe methods of practice than the Sōtō school, thus reinforcing the association of Zen with martial virtues and ideas of dispassion, willpower and self-control separately from *bodhisattvic* aspects of Mahāyāna philosophy.

⁴⁴⁷ Dennis Lishka, "Zen and the Creative Process: The 'Kendo-Zen' Thought of the Rinzai Master Takuan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 5, no. 2-3 (1978): 144.

⁴⁴⁸ Keenan, "Spontaneity in Western Martial Arts - a Yogacara Critique of *Mushin* (No-Mind)," 34.

⁴⁴⁹ McFarlane, "*Mushin*, Morals, and Martial Arts - a Discussion of Keenan's Yogacara Critique -," 399.

⁴⁵⁰ Dumoulin, *Zen Enlightenment*, 6-7.

⁴⁵¹ See comments on the treatment of Zen as a "pastime" in Chen-Chi Chang, "The Nature of Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism," *Philosophy East & West* 6, no. 4 (1957): 333.

A third feature of his exposition was that, in the context of an exchange between the Western "Orientalists" and Japanese intellectuals anxious to prove that Japanese philosophies could match those of the West, he approximated, on what may be considered insufficiently explored premises, a number of Zen concepts to Western philosophical ideas, such that at least two Western psychologists influenced by Zen, Erich Fromm and Carl Jung, considered the aims of psychoanalysis and Zen to be the same.⁴⁵³ By using Western terms such as the "Unconscious" and "inhibitions",⁴⁵⁴ Suzuki obscured Zen's underpinning in the Mahāyāna understanding of mind and the illusory nature of self. Finally, he asserted that Zen was neither philosophy nor religion and could be allied to any ideology,⁴⁵⁵ a view that can be found reflected by some Western martial artists, such as Joe Hyams, who asserts that "Zen has no theory".⁴⁵⁶

While these misconceptions might afflict some forms of martial arts' practice, this is not true of Ueshiba's *aikidō* which, with its emphasis on creation of harmony and "universal love", cannot be accused of lack of awareness of the need for compassion. Keenan's conclusion was that much of what passes for Zen in the martial arts is the Daoist-derived concept of spontaneity which was incorporated into the Ch'an notion of no-mind. His contention is that such spontaneity comes from body awareness, and therefore does not concord with the Yogācāra view of the need to reverse the basis of bodily consciousness.⁴⁵⁷ Interestingly, however, as will be shown below, *aikidō* manifests the compatibility of all three ways of viewing reality.

⁴⁵² Nan Huai-Chin, for example, laments modern images of Zen which neglect its Chinese origins and lists six contemporary misunderstandings. See Nan, *The Story of Chinese Zen*, 64-68.

⁴⁵³ Cox, *The Zen Arts*, 29.

⁴⁵⁴ Dumoulin, *Zen Enlightenment*, 4-7.

⁴⁵⁵ Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Joseph S. O'Leary (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1992), 8.

⁴⁵⁶ Joe Hyams, *Zen in the Martial Arts* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1979), 2.

⁴⁵⁷ Keenan, "Spontaneity in Western Martial Arts - a Yogacara Critique of *Mushin* (No-Mind)," 37-40.

An answer to Keenan's criticisms can be found partly in the insightful comment by Deshimaru that, in the Zen view, the "original nature of existence cannot be apprehended by our senses, our impressions" and that therefore the "objective matter" thus apprehended is "not real, not true substance" but rather "imagination".⁴⁵⁸ Zen practice, he says, is concerned with accessing this original nature of existence; because the martial arts require heightened awareness and observation of sense impressions through a method which, like Zen, integrates mind and body, they can lead to a similar exploration of the relation of mind to reality:

Budo has investigated in a direct way the existing relationship between ethics, religion and philosophy...The ancient texts on this subject deal essentially with mental culture and reflection on the nature of the self: who am I?⁴⁵⁹

Zen and *aikidō*: common approaches to reality

In order to ascertain whether Ueshiba's *aikidō* really affords a manner of spiritual practice in the Zen mode, a more comprehensive consideration of Zen metaphysics than that often given in portrayals of Zen and the martial arts is necessary.

Like all forms of Buddhism, Ch'an holds to the general Buddhist view of life that "desire inevitably causes suffering," and that the way out of suffering is the attaining of *nirvāṇa*, which thus becomes the ultimate goal of practice.⁴⁶⁰ It also shares the ontological ground of Mahāyāna Buddhism, an approach to Buddhism which arose between 150 BC and the first century AD. As already mentioned, this approach emphasises "the deep 'emptiness' of phenomena". What is less often appreciated in the martial arts is that it also stresses the Buddha as a "glorified, transcendent being" (rather than just a historical

⁴⁵⁸ Deshimaru, *Zen et arts martiaux*, 30.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁶⁰ Ward, "The Meaning of Life," 21.

personage), and adoption of the way of the *bodhisattva*. The latter is an enlightened being, not yet a fully perfected Buddha, who “dedicates himself to helping others attain liberation”, and whose attributes include “self-mastery, wisdom, and compassion”.⁴⁶¹

Underpinning Ch’an are the main Mahāyāna tenets that reality is “Empty” and phenomena are mental products.⁴⁶² Also important for a proper appreciation of Ch’an is the concept of the “Buddha-potential” within all beings, the *Tathāgata-garbha*,⁴⁶³ which is linked to the idea of Buddha-nature.⁴⁶⁴ According to Sallie King this is one of the foundational concepts of East Asian Buddhism which impacted on all four main Chinese Buddhist schools (and from them, the Japanese schools), especially Ch’an.⁴⁶⁵ It has, however, she claims, been neglected by Western scholars which may account for its lack of prominence in works on Zen and the martial arts. Buddha-nature is not an entity but “the process of infinite transformation”⁴⁶⁶ inherent in all phenomena which is apprehended when the deluded mind of everyday is cleared away. It was especially emphasised in Japan by Dōgen, who regarded “just sitting” (*shikantaza* in Japanese) as the way to let inherent Buddha-nature manifest

⁴⁶¹ See Philip Kapleau (compiled and ed.), *The Three Pillars of Zen Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, updated and revised ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 395.

⁴⁶² Dumoulin, *Understanding Buddhism*, 130.

⁴⁶³ *Tathāgata-garbha* is composed of two terms, *Tathāgata* and *garbha*. The first can be understood in two ways, meaning “thus gone” (in realisation to *nirvāna*), or “thus come” (that is from *nirvāna* to *samsara* to aid sentient beings). *Garbha* means “embryo” or “womb”, the latter translation, implying a container, being the preferred Chinese translation. Sallie B. King, *Buddha Nature*, ed. Kenneth K. Inada, *Suny Series in Buddhist Studies* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991), 4.

⁴⁶⁴ Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 114-15.

⁴⁶⁵ King 3, 157

⁴⁶⁶ “Yasutani-roshi’s commentary (teisho) on the Koan Mu” quoted in Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, 85. Hakuun Ryōko Yasutani (1885-1973) was a Zen master in Tokyo from 1943. He travelled to the United States several times in the 1960s and his disciples include Philip Kapleau.

itself.⁴⁶⁷ Explaining ideas expressed in the *Tathāgata-garbha* literature, King summarises thus:

The world is not chaotic, we need not be lost in it. There is a principle, discoverable by humans, manifesting the order of the universe. By realizing this principle (more closely, by bringing ourselves into accordance with this principle) we may discover this truth of the universe, which also is the truth of our own nature.⁴⁶⁸

Superficially, it may seem that *aikidō*, which is concerned mainly with the concept of *ki*, has little in common with the Zen ontological view. In the opinion of this author, however, the link is afforded by interpretations of “Emptiness” which indicate that it is not, as often implied in Western writings, a vacuum, but a vibrant formlessness comparable with the notion of *ki*, as Yasutani explains:

Now, ku is not mere emptiness. It is that which is living, dynamic, devoid of mass, unfixed, beyond individuality or personality – the matrix of all phenomena.⁴⁶⁹

The concept of *ki* is not often mentioned in the context of Zen Buddhism, but it is implied, for instance in the Zen master Hōgen Yamahata’s statement that “Zazen [Zen seated meditation] is the recognition of the universal life, as it is, within us”.⁴⁷⁰ Examples can, too, be found of direct reference to it by Zen masters, such as Taizan Maezumi (1931-1995)⁴⁷¹ who instructed Zen

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁶⁸ King, *Buddha Nature*, 32.

⁴⁶⁹ “Yasutani-roshi’s Commentary (Teisho) on the Koan Mu” in Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, 85.

⁴⁷⁰ Hogen Yamahata, *On the Open Way* (Liskeard, Cornwall: Jiko Oasis Books, n.d.), 21.

⁴⁷¹ Taizan Maezumi (1931-1995) was a Zen master who founded the Los Angeles Zen centre in 1967. See Jacques Brosse, *Les Maîtres Zen*, ed. Jean Mouttapa and Marc de Smedt, Revised ed., *Spiritualités Vivantes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), 325-26.

practitioners to fill their bodies with *ki* when sitting in *zazen* (seated meditation), and work on the *kōan*⁴⁷² *muji* as if “Mu itself were ‘ki’”.⁴⁷³

The following description of the relation of *ki* to “Emptiness” by Deshimaru further reveals how the notion of *ki* is linked to Zen practice of stilling the discursive mind. *Ki*, he says, manifests directly when conceptual thought no longer dominates consciousness:

This life of *ku* is an infinite unlimited energy [*ki*] that we can receive when we are in harmony with universal life: it then penetrates us unconsciously, naturally and without any resistance.⁴⁷⁴

The link between the ideas of *ki* and “Emptiness” provides an essential clue to the relationship between Zen and *aikidō* which is confirmed in Ueshiba’s images of “Emptiness” as brimming with vibrant though invisible life. A second correlation between the Zen and *aikidō* world views is found in Ueshiba’s frequent reference to the human person’s “true nature”, a synonym for “Buddha-nature”, as something to be discovered through *aikidō* practice. Just as the *Tathāgata-garbha* literature cited above refers to a “principle discoverable by humans”, so Ueshiba linked *aikidō* practice to the idea of alignment with a principle: “Aikido is the Way of the principle of the eternal, unchanging system of the Universe.”⁴⁷⁵

A comparison can also be drawn between the idea of Buddha-nature and Ueshiba’s references to Takamahara, the celestial home of the Shintō deities.

⁴⁷² *Kōan* (*kung-an* in Chinese, meaning “public record”) were originally records of question-and-answer sessions between Zen masters and their pupils which were later compiled into anthologies and used as themes in meditation. See Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 157.

⁴⁷³ Taizan Maezumi, *Ki* (23 March 1994 version) (Undated, probably mid or late 1970s), available from <ftp://coombs.anu.edu.au/coombspapers/otherarchives/electro.../maezumi-teisho-mid-70s.tx>.

⁴⁷⁴ Deshimaru, *Zen et arts martiaux*, 129.

⁴⁷⁵ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 2,” 43.

Just as Buddha-nature is the intrinsic mind which is the shared ground of being, so Takamahara is within oneself as well as the whole of cosmic life:

Takaamahara is in ourselves. You will never find it either in Heaven or on Earth no matter how hard you look. You must realize that it is within you.⁴⁷⁶

Zen and aikidō practice: no-mind and development of the heart

Zen's distinctiveness lies not so much in its tenets, which are those of Mahāyāna in general, but in its unique manner of approaching Buddhist teaching. Like many Buddhist schools, Zen emphasises direct experience of reality, rather than, for instance, faith in an external agency or use of dialectical logic. In contrast to other schools, it does not use visualisation as a technique (unless one counts visualisation of "Emptiness"). Study and chanting of the *sūtras* and reverence for Śākyamuni and *bodhisattvas*, meanwhile, although not absent from Zen, play a subsidiary rather than leading role.

As means to apprehension of reality, Zen emphasises above all cutting through discursive thought to the undifferentiating ground of Buddha-nature beyond thinking and conceptualisation. For this reason, enlightenment in Zen is often described as "seeing one's original face" or "true self", in contradistinction to the "delusory empirical ego".⁴⁷⁷ As Philip Kapleau puts it: "Buddhism has clearly demonstrated that discriminative thinking lies at the root of delusion".⁴⁷⁸

Another way of describing the objective of Zen practice is to say that it restores the "intrinsic state of the mind", which is contrasted with the "delusional" state of everyday mind split between subject and object.⁴⁷⁹ It thus leads to an experience of unity in which no difference is perceived between self and world, a non-dual state in which "the knower and the known coincide,

⁴⁷⁶ Ueshiba Morihei, "Takemusu aiki 4," 77.

⁴⁷⁷ Dumoulin, *Understanding Buddhism*, 29.

⁴⁷⁸ Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, 35.

⁴⁷⁹ Stephen Hodge, *The World of Zen* (London: Godsfield Press, 2000), 24.

subjectivity and objectivity are mutually identified".⁴⁸⁰ This is a state of intuitive wisdom whose relationship with "Emptiness" is explained by Fa-Yun thus: "When a mental attitude and the external world are not created, it is the Void". Such a vision bears comparison with Ueshiba's exhortation to *aikidōka* to become "one with the Universe",⁴⁸¹ or to "return to the unity of the self with the universe".⁴⁸²

Like Zen, *aikidō* also relies on understanding by experience and its training method is similarly based on non-thinking,

The key to aikido lies in continuous training as well as enlightenment through experience rather than thought. It is not something that can be taught to us by others, but rather is discovered directly. This spirit is definitely the same as the spirit of Zen, which professes the importance of direct experience in the acquisition of knowledge (*reidan jichi*).⁴⁸³

As mentioned, the requirement for apprehension of reality as conceived of in Zen is the state of "no-mind", in which total absence of thought allows the "Emptiness" or unfixedness of phenomena to be directly cognited. A breakthrough to this state of being is termed "enlightenment" (*wu* in Chinese, meaning literally, "to awake to the fact"; *satori* or *kenshō* in Japanese). This is not, as often assumed in writings on the martial arts, a single experience but an initial breakthrough which needs to be fully mastered, deepened, and matured through sustained practice.⁴⁸⁴

Such practice takes several forms for, contrary to popular perception, Ch'an/Zen spiritual methods are not unitive and have been interpreted with

⁴⁸⁰ Chang Chung-Yuan, *Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism Selected from the Transmission of the Lamp*, Vintage Books ed. (New York: Random House, 1971), 6.

⁴⁸¹ Ueshiba Morihei, "Takemusu aiki 4," 70.

⁴⁸² Ueshiba Morihei, "Excerpts from the Writings," 7.

⁴⁸³ Kamata and Shimizu, *Zen to aikidō*, 9.

⁴⁸⁴ Chang, "The Nature of Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism," 340.

varying emphasis by many masters throughout the Zen schools' 1600-year history. Their main instruments for developing spiritual insight, however, are *shikantaza* ("just sitting") in the *zazen* (seated meditation) posture, which is the main practice in the Japanese Sōtō school, meditation via sustained concentration on *mu* (which can be in the seated posture or while going about everyday tasks), meditation on *kōan* with study of commentaries by Zen masters, *mondō* (Zen-style dialogues), which are practised particularly in the Rinzai school, and personal interviews (*dokusan*) with the Zen master. Although differing in style, these practices all have the same aim of freeing the adept's mind from "old habits, prejudices, restrictive thought-processes, and even ordinary conceptual thought".⁴⁸⁵ Conceptual thinking is not excluded entirely from Zen instruction, and Zen masters gave readily understandable expositions of Buddhist teaching,⁴⁸⁶ but it is seen as limited and unable to convey the actual experience of reality which has therefore to be intuited.

Integral to understanding the role of Zen meditation is the idea of restoring correct vision by removing delusion arising from the complex of concepts and thoughts which stem from the interaction of the six senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and thought) with the "seeds" of past karma held in the *ālaya-vijñāna*.⁴⁸⁷ Such mental creations include "ideologies, beliefs, opinions, and points of view, not to mention the factual knowledge accumulated since birth" which obscure one's vision.⁴⁸⁸ Zen sees these thoughts as the accumulations constituting the ego-self and the breakthrough is achieved when the "flow of thoughts suddenly stops".⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁵ Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 156.

⁴⁸⁶ Chang, "The Nature of Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism," 338.

⁴⁸⁷ Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, 400.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴⁸⁹ Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 275.

In an important sense, therefore, Zen meditation methods are a purification process often described as a “battle” between the “opposing forces of delusion and bodhi”,⁴⁹⁰ in which the objective is “victory over the self”. A result of practice to remove the factors of ego is the shedding of consciousness both of separate body and individual mind, an experience described by Dōgen as *datsuraku*.⁴⁹¹ Enlightenment in the Zen sense is thus a cosmic experience in which the ego is transcended.

The objective of removing the constituting factors of the ego-self, fundamental to Zen practice, was also paramount in Ueshiba’s understanding of *aikidō*. According to Nocquet, Ueshiba saw all the problems of humankind as issuing from the conflict between the human heart and the ego.⁴⁹² He referred not only to the need to “give up our ego”, but also, in a manner typical of Dōgen’s notion that striving to attain is a projection of the ego-self, to the idea that abandoning the ego requires freedom from all “endeavor”.⁴⁹³ In this context, Ueshiba’s description of the practice of *aikidō* as purification (expressed in terms of the Shintō concept of *misogi*) can legitimately be understood as effort to remove the causes of ego-centred consciousness.

In a further example of the interaction of body and mind, the link between “no-mind” and no ego is well demonstrated in *aikidō*, for, as Deshimaru explains, when body and brain are moved by the ego, they are stuck in a “closed circuit”⁴⁹⁴ which translates as calculated or restricted movement. In contrast,

⁴⁹⁰ Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, 14.

⁴⁹¹ Dumoulin, *Zen Enlightenment*, 22.

⁴⁹² André Nocquet, *Le Coeur épée - Le don de Maître Uyeshiba fondateur de l'aikido à l'occident* (Lezay: Pairault, 1991), 21.

⁴⁹³ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 1,” 29.

⁴⁹⁴ Deshimaru, *Zen et arts martiaux*, 131.

when “freed of his ego”, a person practising *aikidō* can “execute a movement perfectly, with ease and as if in fun”.⁴⁹⁵

This explains the connection between Zen practice and intuition and spontaneity of action which feature prominently in the Zen arts, for example in the single brush stroke of the execution of calligraphy. To put it differently, spontaneous creativity emanates naturally from a unified consciousness rather than from calculation. It is instructive, therefore, that this is how Nocquet quotes Ueshiba as describing *aikidō*. There are, he records Ueshiba as saying, two types of movement: one which is prepared in advance, and the other which is not governed by the will but emerges naturally. The first is a conscious and ordinary human action; the second is inspired by nature and is generated naturally.⁴⁹⁶ Paradoxically, this type of action can only emerge after long practice to discipline the egotistic mind through the body until conceptual thought no longer hinders action: “the mirror of the heart does not possess the faculty of judgement, but because it is pure and smooth, without attachment or hindrance, it reflects perfectly everything in heaven and earth and is completely open to the spontaneity of nature”.⁴⁹⁷ For this reason, Zen practice has sometimes been perceived as a “merging of the individual in the processes around him”.⁴⁹⁸ Nocquet shows how this attitude relates to *aikidō* practice to harmonise *ki*: “to realise union with cosmic energy is the necessary condition for the emergence of natural inspiration. This requires a state of total mental vacuity”.⁴⁹⁹

Zen meditation provides methods by which the practitioner can observe his or her own mental creations rather than be implicated in them, and through this practice grasp, either gradually or suddenly, their insubstantiality and his/her

⁴⁹⁵ Nocquet, *Zen et aiki*, 13.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁹⁸ Smart, *The Religious Experience*, 237.

⁴⁹⁹ Nocquet, *Zen et aiki*, 18.

insubstantiality as well. Although Zen methods are distinctive, they include elements of the traditional Buddhist practices of meditative concentration to calm the mind and development of insight into the true nature of reality.⁵⁰⁰

This study holds that, although not explicitly referred to in Ueshiba's discourse, *aikidō* incorporates many aspects of the Zen approach to spiritual practice. For instance, the two main styles of Zen meditation, *shikantaza* and concentration of *mu*, are both applied in *aikidō*. In *shikantaza*, the Zen monk practices not conceptualising or fixating on any thought, while in meditation on *mu* an image of "Emptiness" is sustained to the exclusion of all thoughts. Both have their counterparts in *aikidō* where an essential element of performance of technique is not letting the flow of one's movement be interrupted by thought: "Not allowing our minds to be stopped by an object is the most important basic mental element in executing circular movements... Thus, we must not allow the mind to dwell even on our own selves."⁵⁰¹

The practice of such fluidity of mind is particularly enabled by the circular movement basic to *aikidō*.⁵⁰² The practice of *mu*, meanwhile, is enjoined by the need to sustain a state of awareness of *ki*, in which no credence is given to physical solidity. In other words, *aikidō* provides a means to put into practice and prove to oneself through the combined experience of body and mind, the Zen contention that physical form is an illusion, that is, "empty".

In Zen, meditation is usually undertaken in the *zazen* posture, either the lotus position (*padmāsana*),⁵⁰³ half-lotus or a kneeling position. Essential elements of this posture include keeping the spinal column straight and the

⁵⁰⁰ Hodge, *The World of Zen*, 78.

⁵⁰¹ Kamata and Shimizu, *Zen to aikidō*, 29-30.

⁵⁰² For illustrations of the circularity of *aikidō* techniques see Oscar Ratti and Adèle Westbrook, *Aikido and the Dynamic Sphere an Illustrated Introduction* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1970), 329-31.

⁵⁰³ Together with yogic breathing techniques (*prāṇāyāma*), this is one of the obvious Indian influences in Zen. See Dumoulin, *Zen Enlightenment*, 20-21.

shoulders relaxed, deep breathing from the abdomen and the harmonising of “body and breath”.⁵⁰⁴ Kapleau explains the importance of this posture in establishing a new “body-mind equilibrium” centered in the *hara*, the area of the stomach and abdomen with psychic and spiritual significance related to the solar plexus (a centre of the nervous system) and the *tanden*, a point of concentration just below the navel.⁵⁰⁵

These elements, conducive to maintaining equilibrium in the *hara* (known as *haragei*), are regarded as essential for the proper conduct of many Japanese arts, including the martial arts, since such centering greatly assists coordination and efficiency of movement. As Kapleau observes, however, in itself practice of *haragei* is “only indirectly related to satori and not synonymous with it”.⁵⁰⁶ Maintenance of body-mind equilibrium can assist the meditation process, but without the right intentionality it does not lead to that revolution of the mind which is the aim of Zen. It should also be noted that in Takuan’s view, resting the mind in the *hara* was only the beginning of practice. The real Zen practice was the “non-abiding mind” which did not rest anywhere.

In the Zen monastery, meditative practice is tempered with constant reminders of the need to abandon the ego, for example through daily recitation of the Buddhist *sūtras*.⁵⁰⁷ In the view of Kapleau, such reminders of the *bodhisattva* dedication to the enlightenment of all, serve as a salutary counterbalance to any egoistic tendencies which might surface as a result of pride in *kenshō* experiences.

⁵⁰⁴ See the description in Fujimoto Rindo, Roshi, *The Way of Zazen*, trans. Inoue Tetsuya and Tanigawa Yoshihiko (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge Buddhist Association, 1966), 2-7.

⁵⁰⁵ Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, 15-16.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁰⁷ Paul Arnold, *Le Zen et la tradition Japonaise*, ed. Louis Pauwels, *Bibliothèque de l'irrationnel et des grands mystères* (Paris: Denoel, 1973), 16.

In practice of the martial arts, where such a chastening framework is often lacking, this important dimension risks being overlooked. This is not the case, however, in Ueshiba's *aikidō*, where pursuit of no-mind clearly entailed cultivation of compassion. It is an outstanding feature of *aikidō* that it provides a framework in which the link between thought and egoic impulse is obvious. Ueshiba's intention was clear in his description of the way of the sword as being "a fundamental exercise...in cutting us away from our ego and our preoccupied heart",⁵⁰⁸ and insistence that one should emulate the "great love of the universe" and make one's mission "the protection and love of all things".⁵⁰⁹ In this way his *aikidō* associated practice of no-mind with cultivation of *bodhisattva* qualities of wisdom and compassion.

Therefore, although the Zen mode was not perhaps the prime inspiration for *aikidō*, there is clear evidence to show not only that Ueshiba's *aikidō* incorporated many elements of Zen spirituality but that it cultivated precisely those Buddhist qualities which some scholars are inclined to accuse the martial arts of ignoring.

⁵⁰⁸ Nocquet, *Zen et aiki*, 49.

⁵⁰⁹ Ueshiba Kisshōmaru and Ueshiba Morihei, "Interview with O-Sensei and Kisshōmaru Ueshiba – Part IV," 6.

Chapter Five: Aikidō and Shingon Mikkyō - body, sound and mind

Of the two main symbolic ways in which Ueshiba described *aikidō*, one was in terms of the Shintō *kami* and the other was in the geometric iconography of Shingon Mikkyō⁵¹⁰ (also known as Esoteric, or Japanese Tantric, Buddhism), a school of Buddhism systematised by Kūkai (774-835) in the ninth century.⁵¹¹ The *aikidō* teacher Tetsutaka Sugawara relates, for example, that Ueshiba described *aikidō* as “triangle, square, and circle, with breath”, a clear reference to symbols used in Shingon.⁵¹² Ueshiba’s discourse also included reference to deities of the Shingon pantheon, such as Amida, Fudō Myōō, or Kanzeon (Avalokitesvara),⁵¹³ all of whom are *bodhisattvas* associated with compassion who matched his vision of *aikidō* as an art expressive of universal love.

It is also apparent from several sources that performance of Tantric exercises formed part of Ueshiba’s daily spiritual practice and that his interest in Shingon’s colourful, evocative rituals dated from his childhood in the Tanabe area where Shingon temples were prevalent.⁵¹⁴ As, in his youth, Ueshiba is said to have frequently practised asceticism in the mountains, he may well have

⁵¹⁰ Shingon means “true word” and Mikkyō means “secret teaching”, that is the teaching of the “secret (unrevealed) Buddha”, in contrast to *Kengyō*, “revealed teaching”. See Kiyota Minoru, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1978), 27.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵¹² C. Jeffrey Dykhuizen, “Sugawara Tetsutaka Discusses Aikido, Ueshiba Morihei, & the Kagura-Kotodama Staff,” *Journal of Asian Martial Arts* 12, no. 2 (2003): 76. The triangle, circle and square are also used diagrammatically in Shintō, but are there represented superimposed on each other rather than in a vertical structure; see Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 188.

⁵¹³ See Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 4,” 35 and 38. Amida (Amitabha), also the main deity of Pure Land Buddhism, is known as the Buddha of Infinite Life because of his infinite compassion. Fudo Myoo (Acala) is a wrathful deity who cuts through delusion with the sword held in his right hand, and binds those led by their passions with the rope in his left in order to lead them to the correct path. He is nevertheless a compassionate figure who has vowed to save all beings for eternity. Kanzeon (Avalokitesvara) is the “Bodhisattva Who Perceives the Sounds of the World” and vowed to hear the voices of people, save those who suffer and dispel evil. He can change into many different forms to save people and often appears in female form performing acts of compassion with many hands. See Shingon Buddhist International Institute, *Jusan Butsu the Thirteen Buddhas of the Shingon School* [Web site] (HeavenEarth Net, 1998[accessed on 2003]), available from <http://www.shingon.org/deities/deities.html>.

⁵¹⁴ Ueshiba Kisshōmaru, *Aikido Kaiso Ueshiba Morihei Den*, 51-52.

acquired further knowledge of Shingon practices from adepts of Shugendō, which combined elements of Shintō and Tantric Buddhism and had a centre in the Kumano mountain range to the east of Tanabe.

Kisshōmaru has suggested that it was Ueshiba's knowledge of Shingon teaching which paved the way for his ready assimilation of the teachings of Ōmoto, particularly those concerning *kotodama*, the science of sacred sound, which were influential in the creation of *aikidō* as will be shown in the following chapter.⁵¹⁵ This is entirely credible given that Shingon, which predates Zen in the history of Japanese Buddhism, has had many centuries of interaction with Japanese indigenous beliefs. Noting its far-reaching impact on Japanese culture, one of the foremost contemporary Japanese scholars of Shingon, Hakeda Yoshito, observed that Esoteric Buddhism has many "elements compatible" with Shintō, such as:

the idea of the oneness of man and nature, a belief in the magical efficacy of the word (mantra in the former, *kotodama* in the latter), and the concept of a ritually consecrated realm.⁵¹⁶

He also suggests that the fusion of Buddhism and Shintō (*honji suijaku*) owed much to the system of thought elaborated by Kūkai,⁵¹⁷ who expressed the view that all the Shintō *kami* were aspects of the *Tathāgata*.⁵¹⁸

When Ueshiba mentioned concepts or deities normally classed as belonging to Shintō, therefore, he might equally well have been referring to the Shingon teachings with which they are often interchangeable. The Shintō *kami* Amaterasu ō-mikami, whom Ueshiba particularly venerated, for instance, has

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 53.

⁵¹⁶ Yoshito S. Hakeda, *Kūkai Major Works Translated, with an Account of His Life and a Study of His Thought*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary, trans. Yoshito Hakeda, *Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 7.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁵¹⁸ Pierre Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, trans. Barbara Bray (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), 85.

been equated for centuries with Mahāvairocana (Dainichi nyorai in Japanese), the Shingon personification of ultimate truth.⁵¹⁹ In this manner, Shingon may have contributed to the development of *aikidō* in more ways than can be immediately recognised. There are certainly strong grounds for believing that the Shingon method, particularly its use of visualisation techniques and combination of body, mind and sound, inspired Ueshiba in his adaptation of the body movements of traditional Japanese martial arts. Such an application of Shingon practices was not without precedent, for Shingon is known to have influenced the development of at least one swordsmanship school, the Katori-ryū.⁵²⁰ A contemporary explanation of some Shingon symbolism used in *kendō* such as the *mudrā* known as the Hokkai jō-in⁵²¹ has also been given by Inoue Yoshihiko.⁵²²

History of Shingon Mikkyō in Japan

Shingon is one of two schools of Tantric Buddhism which developed in Japan in the ninth century, the other being Tendai, founded by the monk Saichō (767-822). Kūkai and Saichō travelled to China at the same time in 804 to broaden their knowledge of Buddhism.

Kūkai is said to have been dissatisfied with the Japanese Buddhism at that time, that of the Six Nara Schools, which was closely regulated by Confucianist law.⁵²³ According to Ryūichi Abé, who has put forward a new theory to explain Kūkai's journey to China, Kūkai's main criticism of the Nara Schools was that they were unable to link philosophy (such as Māhāyana concepts of Void and

⁵¹⁹ Bocking, *A Popular Dictionary of Shinto*, 4.

⁵²⁰ Kiyota, *Kendō*, 19-20.

⁵²¹ A Shingon hand gesture representing union with the cosmos. See *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵²² Inoue Yoshihiko, "Hokkai-Join and Reflections on the Meaning of Mokuso," *Kendo World* 11, no. 1 (2001).

⁵²³ Ryuichi Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 28.

dependent origination), to actual experience.⁵²⁴ According to Abé, it was discovery of the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (*Dainichi-kyō* in Japanese), a Buddhist text little known at the time and which referred to practices to transpose theory into experience, that motivated Kūkai to travel to China to elucidate its meaning, including reading it in the original Sanskrit.⁵²⁵ In other words, the *sūtra* provided a vital link between the theory of enlightenment and the practical means to attain it. This emphasis on actualisation of theory which is a distinctive feature of Shingon provides an important clue to the relation of Shingon to *aikidō* as will be shown below.

Kūkai became a resident priest at the Hsi-ming-ssu, a major centre of Buddhist learning in Ch'ang-an, the capital of the Chinese T'ang court.⁵²⁶ He was introduced to Hui-kuo (746-805), a famous Chinese Buddhist master who instructed him in the "mantras and Sanskrit hymns, the mudrās and visualization of the sacred symbols, all of which constitute the yogic system of the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*".⁵²⁷ After only thirty months in China, Kūkai was ordained a Master of Esoteric Buddhism and the Eighth Patriarch, and returned to Japan in 806, laden with *sūtras*, texts, mandalas, portraits and other religious items.⁵²⁸ He later enjoyed imperial patronage and became administrative head of the Tōdai-ji in Nara. Kūkai is credited with many achievements, such as founding a school of art and science, compiling the first Japanese dictionary and the architectural design of the great Shingon temple complex on Mount Kōya.⁵²⁹

From this brief sketch it can be seen that Kūkai introduced to Japan a style of Buddhist teaching not hitherto known there and characterised by the use

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 108.

⁵²⁵ Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 109.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 116.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 123.

⁵²⁸ Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, 29.

⁵²⁹ Ibid., 32-33.

of colourful iconography, ritual resonance and symbol. It is noteworthy that at the time of Kūkai's journey, Tantric Buddhism had been established in China for only about one hundred years and was therefore still close to its Indian roots.⁵³⁰ This proximity is reflected in the strong correlation between Shingon practice and the Indian spiritual techniques of kundalinī yoga, a relationship which is significant for understanding the connection between Japanese Tantric Buddhism and *aikidō*.

Identification with the cosmic Buddha

Tantric Buddhism, also known as Vajrayāna,⁵³¹ is a branch of Buddhism which shares the doctrinal ground of Mahāyāna but has developed its own distinct theories of spiritual practice. These come in the class of what Buddhism calls "skilful means" (*upāya* in Sanskrit), that is methods of attaining enlightenment based on "skilful" techniques to transform human consciousness. The term "tantra" means "a thread" and is used to refer to religious literature which deals with devices, such as incantation or iconography, used to represent truth.⁵³²

Like the Mahāyāna schools of Buddhism, Vajrayāna rests on the Mādhyamika, Yogācāra and *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrines concerning "Emptiness", dependent origination and Buddha-nature. The outstanding feature of Vajrayāna, however, is that it identifies ultimate truth with the "eternal enlightened body" of the cosmic Buddha, the *dharmakāya*.⁵³³ In Buddhist philosophy, the latter is a term used to designate one of three bodies of the Buddha, the others being the *nirmānakāya* (the physical body of the historical Buddha) and the *samboghakāya* ("literally a 'rewarded-body', that is the body of

⁵³⁰ Byron Earhart, *Japanese Religion*, 86.

⁵³¹ Vajrayāna (literally, "Diamond Vehicle") arose mainly in north-east and north-west India around 500 AD and reached Tibet, China and Japan from Central Asia and India. See Schuhmacher and Woerner, *The Rider Encyclopedia*, 398.

⁵³² Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 5.

⁵³³ Reginald A. Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World the Tantric Buddhism of Tibet. The World of Tibetan Buddhism Vol. 2*, First paperback ed. (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2002), 117.

one who is 'rewarded' with the fruits of enlightenment as the result of having perfected *bodhisattva* practices").⁵³⁴ The *dharmakāya* is a kind of "illuminating principle", that exists independently of all the Buddhas but is nevertheless often personified as Tathāgata ("He who has become aware of ...things as they are") or Mahāvairocana (Dainichi-kyo).⁵³⁵

The essence of Vajrayāna is its emphasis on transformation of the human being through identification with the cosmic Buddha. Its methods are based on the premise, derived from the Yogācāra philosophy of contingency, that the mind is not fixed and hence is capable of being transformed from a deluded state to a non-deluded one.⁵³⁶ Such transformation can take place within the world of everyday reality but requires special practices.

In common with Zen Buddhism, Vajrayāna holds the view that the naturally enlightened mind, or Buddha-nature, exists in all sentient beings but is "covered over by defilements of all sorts" issuing from "rigid and defensive ego structures". This Buddha-nature is the same as the *dharmakāya*,⁵³⁷ an equivalence which forms the basis for identifying the human person with the cosmic Buddha, and makes possible the Esoteric Buddhist practices which aim to actualise Mahāyāna philosophy through "the integration of man with the cosmic Buddha".⁵³⁸ The basic aim of these techniques is to dissolve the egoic self so that the Buddha-nature may be revealed.⁵³⁹

Like Zen Buddhism, Shingon sees the pure mind as that which is "unpolluted by acquired knowledge" which fragments the world.⁵⁴⁰ However,

⁵³⁴ Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 58.

⁵³⁵ Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, 15.

⁵³⁶ Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 59.

⁵³⁷ Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World*, 103-4.

⁵³⁸ Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 2.

⁵³⁹ Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World*, 107.

⁵⁴⁰ Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 31.

while Zen reaches this understanding by methods aimed at cessation of discriminating thought, Shingon uses “forms, colors and movements” to “purify their [practitioners] delusions, thoughts, and actions”.⁵⁴¹ The function of these techniques is to bring about a transformation in the mind such that it can perceive the Dharma-realm, “where insight penetrates into the mutual interfusion of everything”.⁵⁴² Through these techniques the practitioner comes to realise that:

the apparently solid and enduring “I” is an illusion and is actually a superficial label attached to the endless flow of experiential moments...⁵⁴³

This understanding leads to *prajñā* (wisdom), which means “right cognition” and is synonymous with “the understanding of emptiness as the ontological basis of existence”.⁵⁴⁴ It is achieved by transforming the deluded mind and leads to the perfection of the qualities of the *bodhisattva*, for insight into emptiness makes possible the heart of the *bodhisattva*, a heart “without agenda”, which gives freely to others and is thus unconditionally compassionate.⁵⁴⁵

Here some correlations with *aikidō* in both the intent and function of Shingon can already be observed. As seen, Ueshiba conceived of the Universe as having an invisible structure founded on a principle which could be apprehended by the *aikidō* practitioner through practice of *aikidō* movements. In *aikidō* this structural principle is not personified as the *dharmakāya*, but it is nevertheless visualised as spherical and spiralic patterns of cosmic dimension coordinated round a central axis into which the practitioner aims to integrate his or her

⁵⁴¹ Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 133.

⁵⁴² Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 119.

⁵⁴³ Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World*, 93.

⁵⁴⁴ Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 61.

⁵⁴⁵ Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World*, 96.

movement. *Aiki* in this context conceivably becomes equivalent to merging with the cosmic Buddha.

The emphasis that Ueshiba put on the need to dissolve the ego and *aikidō*'s incorporation of Zen methods for doing this have already been mentioned. In addition to practice in non-fixation of thought, however, *aikidō* can also be seen to provide practice in transformation of mind. This can be seen, for example, in the core *aikidō* turning motion, *taisabaki*, which is not only a physical movement but also an exercise in turning round one's mind.

***Aikidō* and Tantric perspectives on the body**

The method elaborated by Kūkai to achieve integration with the cosmic Buddha is that of the "three secrets" (also called "three mysteries", *sanmitsu* in Japanese) of body, sound and mind, combinatory exercises which integrate breath and hand movements, enunciation of sound and visualisation. The "three secrets" are:

the secret language of the Dharmakāya's body, speech, and mind, through which the cosmic Buddha unveils his innermost enlightenment, the language that, according to the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (T 18:4a-5a), is ritually replicated in the gestural sequences of mudrās, the chanting of mantras, and the visualization of mandala images.⁵⁴⁶

The theory behind them is described in Kūkai's *Shōji jisso gi* (*The Meaning of Sound, Word and Reality*).⁵⁴⁷

The claim being made here is that Ueshiba's creation of *aikidō* was greatly inspired by Kūkai's system. In order to understand how this is possible, it is necessary to situate Shingon in the wider context of Indian Tantric Buddhism from which it derives. The correlation with *aikidō* stems from the fact that Shingon inherited from Indian Tantra the idea that mind and matter are an

⁵⁴⁶ Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 129.

⁵⁴⁷ Hakeda, *Kūkai Major Works*, 234-46.

interrelated flux of energies, linked to a universe in similar flux. The motivating idea of Tantric spiritual practice is to free energies in the human person and redirect them to harmonise with universal energies, usually personified as deities or symbolised through other images. The concordance with *aikidō* derives from this common theme of harmonisation of psychophysical energies.

The parallels with *aikidō* are particularly evident when the practices of Tantric kundalinī yoga are considered. The exercises of this yoga are based on the notion of the “vast potential of psychic energy” at the base of the spine, known as the Kundalinī Śakti, which must be stimulated to rise through the spinal column and the system of psychic centres known as *cakras*, until it becomes fused with pure consciousness, symbolised by the Indian deity Śiva situated above the crown of the head.⁵⁴⁸

The awakening of kundalinī and its journey through the *cakras* is aided by exercises (whose similarity with Inner Alchemy Daoism has already been noted) to purify the channels through which currents of psychic energy flow. The purification process recalls in many respects the notion of *aikidō* as *misogi* and will be considered further below. Grounds for believing that *aikidō* is to some extent an adaptation of the Tantric system are found in Ueshiba’s metaphor for *aikidō* practice as the ascending and descending spiralic dance, to left and right, of the Shintō *kami*, Takami Musubi and Kami Musubi.⁵⁴⁹ This image bears a striking similarity to Tantric descriptions of kundalinī’s spiralic progress through the main channels, the Sushumnā and “its two flanking channels: the white, ‘lunar’ nādī, Idā, on the left, and the red, ‘solar’ nadī, Pingalā, on the right”.⁵⁵⁰

A further common feature of the Tantric and *aikidō* systems is the association of the inner organs and segments of the body with the five

⁵⁴⁸ Ajit Mookerjee, *Kundalini the Arousal of the Inner Energy*, 2001 Reprint ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982), 10-11.

⁵⁴⁹ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 4,” 77.

⁵⁵⁰ Mookerjee, *Kundalini*, 16.

irreducible constituents of the universe. These five elements, which represent the totality of universal reality, are typically depicted throughout Asia in the form of the Buddhist *stūpa*, replicated in architecture, iconography and statues. *Stūpas* generally represent Ultimate Reality in the form of cube (representing earth or solidity), on top of which is a circle representing water, then a triangle symbolising the flame of fire, topped by a half circle representing ether (all-penetrating) and a composite *cintāmani* (triangle joined to a half circle).⁵⁵¹

A parallel image of the human body serves to indicate how ultimate reality may be apprehended. Just as the elements of the cosmos are in equilibrium, so they must be correctly balanced within the human person. The purpose of spiritual exercise is to achieve this balance, an effect of which is to open the psychic energy centres, the *cakras*. In this way, a link is made between the symbolism of the five elements and the *cakras*.

That Kūkai's explanation of reality (although positing six elements – the sixth being human consciousness) was close to this model can be seen in his work *Attaining Enlightenment in this Very Existence*, for example. Here he wrote: "The Six Great Elements are interfused and are in a state of eternal harmony."⁵⁵² Among Shingon practices which apply this understanding to the human body is the meditation on the body composed of the five Elements (*godai-jōshin-kan*).⁵⁵³ In this exercise, the practitioner visualises his or her body in the form of the five elements (where each element corresponds to a *cakra*), performs the related *mūdra* and recites the associated seed syllable which is also visualised.⁵⁵⁴ Similarly, it has been suggested that, in *aikidō*, the act of aiming to remain perfectly balanced at the centre of six forces of attraction and dispersion

⁵⁵¹ Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, 56.

⁵⁵² Hakeda, *Kūkai Major Works*, 88.

⁵⁵³ Adrian Snodgrass, *The Matrix and Diamond Mandalas in Shingon Buddhism*, ed. Lokesh Chandra, 1997 reprint ed., vol. 354-55, *Sata-Pitaka Series Indo-Asian Literatures* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 1988; reprint, 1997), 68.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 68-71.

(six types of potential movement), which requires subtle awareness of fine fluctuations, is a manner of meditation on six elements.⁵⁵⁵

Ueshiba made clear reference to *stūpa* symbolism in the diagrams he drew to describe *aikidō* and in his exhortation to practitioners to “Build a Buddhist tower” within themselves.⁵⁵⁶ He also referred to the need to “learn to control the universal elements within the human heart”.⁵⁵⁷ The conclusion to be drawn is that in his view *aikidō* practice could lead to a state of internal harmony which one might reasonably suppose to be similar to that required in yoga for the opening of the *cakras*.

The three “secrets” as inspiration for *aikidō*

Of the three “secrets” posited in Shingon, the first is the secret of the body, that is use of the body to perform exercises conducive to spiritual development in the Shingon mode. Such exercises include breathing techniques (*prāṇāyāma*) to harmonise the energy flow and still thoughts, and performance of *mūdras*,⁵⁵⁸ ritual finger movements or hand gestures which “illustrate and express the movements of the mind”.⁵⁵⁹ It would be difficult to deny a correlation with *aikidō* here because of overwhelming evidence of the importance of performing technique in conjunction with harmonised breathing. For example, Ueshiba referred to the need to “Give in to the Universal Breath”,⁵⁶⁰ and Abe Seiseki, interpreting Ueshiba’s poetry, described the *aikidō* breathing methods known as *kokyuhō* as “the underpinning of the ki in aiki”.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁵ J. D. Cauhépé and A. Kuang, *Le Jeu des énergies respiratoires, gestuelles et sonores dans la pratique de l'aikido* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, 1984), 74-75.

⁵⁵⁶ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 4,” 83.

⁵⁵⁷ Ueshiba, *Budō*, 34.

⁵⁵⁸ The term *mūdra* means a “sign”, or “seal” (Japanese: *in*).

⁵⁵⁹ Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, 69.

⁵⁶⁰ Ueshiba Morihei, *Budo Training in Aikido*, 14.

⁵⁶¹ Ueshiba Morihei, “O-Sensei’s Songs of the Way (6),” 48.

Among *aikidōka* who have particularly noted the importance of harmonised breathing in *aikidō*, one could cite Kuang, who sees the role of *aikidō*'s rhythmic breathing in association with a sustained thought (for instance, the notion of purification) as being to effect psychic transformations within the human person.⁵⁶² Harmonised breathing, she notes, plays an essential part in all *aikidō* movements. It is first established during the warm-up exercises (*aiki-taiso*) and should ideally be maintained throughout a training session.⁵⁶³

As mentioned, *mūdras* were used in several Japanese martial arts for various purposes, such as belief in their magical power. In *aikidō*, where hand and finger movements to direct the flow of *ki* are especially important,⁵⁶⁴ there are grounds for inferring an application of *mūdras* not for magical purposes, but for spiritual intent as defined here. An example of such hand gesture is the open upward-facing receptive palm (which indicates a "state of being poised to receive energy").⁵⁶⁵ Reasons for believing this include the observation that, rather than techniques to grasp or dominate, as one might expect of a fighting art, *aikidō* movements are primarily concerned with balancing the flow of *ki* within one's body.

In the application of the second "secret", that of speech, uttered as a single syllable or mantric phrase, the relation to the freeing of energy in the *cakras* is even more evident. This is because of the effect of each sound, which produces a different vibration frequency, as described by Ajit Mookerjee.⁵⁶⁶ In Shingon, the sounds used are Sanskrit letters termed *bījas*; these are: A VA RA HA KHA HŪM.⁵⁶⁷ Correct pronunciation of the *bījas*, in an appropriate state of

⁵⁶² Cauhépé and Kuang, *Le Jeu des énergies*, 105.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵⁶⁶ Mookerjee, *Kundalini*, 22.

⁵⁶⁷ Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 66-67.

mind, is held to have the power to raise a person's state of consciousness by putting one in tune with the "same vibrations as created the Universe".⁵⁶⁸

The relation of sound to states of consciousness provides an important clue to how Ueshiba understood the function of *aikidō* as spiritual practice. Some might object that incantation is not part of *aikidō*, but there are many eyewitness accounts of Ueshiba performing *aikidō* movements while enunciating syllabic sounds (as will be explored further in the next chapter). Further, it is here suggested that Ueshiba may have achieved the objective of Tantra, which is to refine intonation until a "root-sound" or "sound-potential" is attained, a "sound with practically no vibration, which has an infinite wave-length". The ability to detect such fine vibration would equate to a spiritual state described by Mookerjee as "Sonic Consciousness" and could explain Ueshiba's extraordinary sensitivity to light, movement, and sound vibrations.⁵⁶⁹

The meanings of the *bījas* are elaborate and too extensive to be examined in detail here. It should, however, be mentioned that the *bīja* A was particularly favoured by Ueshiba in his application of *kotodama* theory. This *bīja*, pronounced on exhalation, represents Emptiness and all-pervasiveness⁵⁷⁰ as well as the element Earth. *Stūpas* are inscribed on one side with the *bījas*, and on the other with the syllable Vam (Va+M), representing the Void, which covers the whole *stūpa*, thus indicating that the Void equals the "complete interpenetration between the five elements and consciousness".⁵⁷¹ The meaning thus implied is that the ultimate insubstantiality of things, Emptiness, can be apprehended when the five elements in the human person are in balance.

⁵⁶⁸ Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, 62.

⁵⁶⁹ Mookerjee, *Kundalini*, 30-31.

⁵⁷⁰ Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice*, 71.

⁵⁷¹ Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, 60-62.

As will be seen in the next chapter (see page 157), Ueshiba often accompanied his *aikidō* movements with utterance of sounds. Although taken from *kotodama*, they have a close relation with the Shingon system. It is therefore reasonable to surmise that Shingon provided the original inspiration for Ueshiba's application of the *kotodama* theory. Sound, such as *kiai*, is used in the martial arts as a fighting tool, but the evidence is that Ueshiba used sounds differently, in a manner more in keeping with the Shingon and Shintō traditions.

The third "secret", mind, means the use of the visualisation faculty to transform the mind from its limited everyday state to one in which it identifies with the *dharmakāya*. Visualisation plays an important part in Shingon spiritual practices, with one of the main instruments for effecting it being the mandala, a complex depiction of the nature of reality. The term itself, composed of the Sanskrit term "manda", meaning "essence" or "bodhi" (enlightenment), and "la" meaning "completion", denotes a state in which bodhi is completed: "Mandala means circle: thus all the virtues are joined together in a ring and absolutely all of them are there".⁵⁷² They are not mere pictures, however, but living symbols into which the practitioner may literally enter, either by positioning him or herself between them in a Shingon temple, or by stepping into one drawn on the ground or through visualisation.⁵⁷³

"Completion" in the Tantric context means an ideal state in which the five basic wisdoms are fully developed. This is achieved through visualisation exercises in which the mandala acts as a guide. In the course of practice, the adept discovers the insubstantiality of rigidly held beliefs and actualises a non-ego-centred vision (a vision of reality unmediated by the discursive mind). This is done in many different ways, for instance through rituals to invite the various wisdoms to enter into oneself from all four directions (South, North, East and West), or through performance of *mudrās* (for instance, of offering) or other

⁵⁷² Ibid., 44.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

body movements (such as prostrations, indicating surrender of the self), repetition of which has a transformative effect on the mind.

That this type of visualisation featured in Ueshiba's personal practice is suggested by his descriptions of himself as Maitreya, or of seeing himself as "the body of Fudo Myo Ou carrying a great shining light of fire on its shoulders" or as the "body of Kan Zeon Bosatsu".⁵⁷⁴ His reference to building "god's (Kami) mind (Kokoro) inside Man's physical body" can be interpreted as having the same implications as Shingon visualisation.⁵⁷⁵ Although Ueshiba's *aikidō* was enacted in a non-religious framework that did not require practitioners to venerate or visualise deities, instances can be found where he instructed practitioners to visualise cosmic motion, as here:

Contemplate the movements of the stars while imagining that you are carried away with them in space. Images of this type will allow you to join with the universal system which is born of "opposites", that is, with Heaven and Earth.⁵⁷⁶

An example of how *aikidō* develops skill in visualisation is provided by George Leonard's description of practising the *aikidō* technique *shihonage* (four-direction throw):

Performing the necessary turn while remaining upright and centered can be a tricky matter. Rather than teaching this maneuver piecemeal, Nadeau [Leonard's teacher] asks us to meditate on the *idea* of the perfect turn. This turn, he tells us, *already exists* at the uke's side. We may think of it as a whirlpool, already spinning there. Once we have this idea firmly in our minds and bodies (and for Nadeau the two are not separate) all we have to do is move to the uke's side, into the whirlpool, into the perfect turn. Everything else – balance, centering, posture, feet, arms, hands – will take care of itself. We are Americans and

⁵⁷⁴ Ueshiba Morihei, "Takemusu aiki I," 35.

⁵⁷⁵ Ueshiba Morihei, *Budo Training in Aikido*.

⁵⁷⁶ Nocquet, *Maître Morihei Uyeshiba présence et message*, 150.

pragmatic. Will it work? We give it a try and find that Nadeau is right. The shiho-nage flows most smoothly when the reality of the *idea* is fixed firmly in the consciousness, and no analysis is needed.⁵⁷⁷

The main mandalas used in Shingon are the Garbhadātu (Womb-pattern) mandala, and Vajradhātu (Diamond-pattern) mandala. The former represents the “knower”, that is “our deepest consciousness”, depicted by the image of Mahāvairocana in its centre. From this central image emanate four Buddhas, each with an accompanying *bodhisattva*: Samantabhadra (to the south-east), Manjusri (to the south-west), Avalokitesvara (to the north-west) and Maitreya (to the north-east).⁵⁷⁸ The central image of the Diamond-mandala, meanwhile, is the Tathāgata, the Absolute, Enlightenment, in its active aspect, suggesting the “freedom of movement belonging to Knowledge”.⁵⁷⁹

Mandala imagery is complex and beyond the scope of this study to describe in detail. However, since *aikidō*'s world view shows similarities with their depiction of reality, a few of their essential aspects will be described here. The following analysis draws extensively on Ray's description of the view of reality depicted in mandala.⁵⁸⁰ Vajrayāna, he explains, understands being as consisting of fundamental energies rooted in the Buddha-nature. These energies are associated with five primary aspects of enlightenment known as the “five wisdoms”. The objective of practice is to express all five wisdoms fully, “in an open, selfless, and unobstructed way”. The understanding of human behaviour and the path to enlightenment as associated with balancing and expression of energies is what links Shingon visualisation to *aikidō*, which is similarly concerned with harmonising of *ki*.

⁵⁷⁷ Leonard, “Aikido and the Mind of the West,” 176.

⁵⁷⁸ Rambach, *The Art of Japanese Tantrism*, 52.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 53.

⁵⁸⁰ Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World*, 131-43.

How *aikidō* movements help to achieve this freeing and balancing of energies will be shown in the next chapter in relation to the Shintō practice of *kotodama*. Here the comparison will be confined to practice of the five wisdoms. These are: “all-pervasive spaciousness” which is developed by contemplation on the element of space; “mirror-like wisdom” which reflects things clearly, just as they are, and is associated with unshakability; “wisdom of equanimity which is all-accommodating” and appreciates the “richness and resourcefulness” of every situation; “wisdom of discriminating awareness” which appreciates the “ultimate beauty and sacredness of each ‘other’ encountered”; and “all-accomplishing wisdom” which manifests as “heightened awareness of the momentum and unfolding of events” rather than self-conscious accomplishment.

The practice of *aikidō* can be shown to develop aspects of the human person on a basis similar to that of the five wisdoms. The first wisdom, all-pervasive spaciousness, is developed, for example, through visualisation of expanded consciousness which is necessary to sustain awareness of the flow of *ki* fundamental to *aikidō* movement. The second wisdom, unshakability, is developed through the requirement to maintain a centred body posture which is never unbalanced by the partner’s momentum. The third, equanimity which appreciates resourcefulness, is nurtured by practice of a wide range of techniques requiring continual adaptability to dynamically changing situations. The fourth, discriminating awareness, is enjoined by the obligation to maintain respect for one’s partner’s *ki*, for instance through the principle of *maai*, correct distance. The fifth, all-accomplishing wisdom, is developed through the practice of responding appropriately to every encounter in order to bring it to harmonious conclusion.

There is ample evidence that Ueshiba’s *aikidō* entailed a conjunction of body movement, breathing, visualisation and enunciation of sound similar to that used in Shingon practice of the “three secrets”. As *aikidō* also had, for Ueshiba,

the same intent as Shingon in providing access to the true nature of reality, it can reasonably be concluded that his *aikidō* was a form of spiritual practice closely patterned on the Shingon method.

Chapter Six: Aikidō and Shintōist beliefs - musubi, misogi and kotodama

It is well known that Ueshiba Morihei was a follower of the Shintō-related Japanese “new religion” Ōmotokyō from 1920, when he took his family to live with the Ōmoto community in Ayabe, until his death in 1969. His preoccupation with Shintō beliefs is evidenced by many references in his lectures and writings to the Shintō myths related in the *Kojiki*, and by his daily observance of Shintō rituals and ascetic practices. Until after World War II the headquarters *dōjō* in Tokyo had a *kamidana* (Shintō shrine),⁵⁸¹ and the testimonies of *aikidōka* record that Ueshiba invoked Shintō deities, the *kami*, at the start of every *aikidō* class.⁵⁸²

Despite this, the extent to which Shintōist beliefs, as well as those specific to Ōmoto, influenced the development of *aikidō* has been little explored. The main reason for this is undoubtedly the fact that most *aikidō* teachers, especially those who travelled abroad, were not Ōmoto adherents and may not have been aware of the meaning of Ōmoto practices. Secondly, those who were Ōmoto believers tended to keep the knowledge within Ōmoto confines. *Aikidō* has continued to be taught within the Ōmoto organisation, but in a variant form (now known as Shin’ei Taïdo) developed by Inoue Noriaki (1902-1994), Ueshiba’s nephew, who reportedly distanced himself from Ueshiba after the Second Ōmoto Incident.⁵⁸³

Other hindrances to appreciation of the Shintō and Ōmoto influences in *aikidō* include preconceptions about the meaning of *kami* and lack of information about Shintō esoteric practices, such as *kotodama*. This Chapter

⁵⁸¹ Goldsbury relates that the *kami* of military arts, Take-mika-zuchi-no-kami, was worshipped there, but that the practice was discontinued when *aikidō* became internationally known and many non-Japanese came to train. See Peter Goldsbury, *Touching the Absolute: Aikido Vs. Religion and Philosophy* [Electronic article] (Aikido Journal, 30 September 2001[accessed on 2002]), available from http://www.aikidojournal.com/articles/_article.asp?ArticleID=1091.

⁵⁸² Cauhépé and Kuang, *Les Arts martiaux intériorisés*, 57.

⁵⁸³ Pranin, *Aikido Masters*, 13.

aims to show that, on the contrary, some aspects of Shintōist interpretations of life are essential for understanding *aikidō*.

Shintō in the Meiji era

Confusion about the meaning of Shintō is not confined to martial artists. Scholars, too, have difficulty in defining its parameters. The term itself is a word of Chinese derivation,⁵⁸⁴ composed of *shin* (神, which can also be read as *kami*) and *-tō* (or *-dō*, 道, “Way”), which has an equivalent in the indigenous word *michi*, and is thus rendered as the “way of the *kami*”.⁵⁸⁵ It began to be used, however, only after the arrival of Buddhism in Japan in the sixth century when it was thought necessary to make a distinction between indigenous beliefs and imported ones. Until then, J. W. T. Mason remarks, “the spiritual belief of the people had no name”, such that some writers prefer the term “*kami*-cults” for the beliefs of the early Japanese period (where “*kami*” referred to the myriad designated deities envisioned in the Japanese conception of life).⁵⁸⁶

The “way” is not a coordinated doctrinal system but grew rather “around certain impulses, sentiments, and feelings associated with an awareness of the sacred in combination with beliefs and rituals thought to have efficacy in the world of agriculture”.⁵⁸⁷ Shintō concepts, based on interpretations of the myths recounted in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, are well known for their imprecision, an outlook which may be a natural consequence of Shintō’s intuitive nature, for it is “impossible to make explicit that which fundamentally by its very nature is vague”.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁴ Inoue Nobutaka, “Introduction What Is Shinto?,” in *Shinto - a Short History*, ed. Inoue Nobutaka (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 1.

⁵⁸⁵ Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, xxi.

⁵⁸⁶ J. W. T. Mason, *The Meaning of Shinto the Primaeval Foundation of Creative Spirit in Modern Japan* (Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat Press, 1967), 56.

⁵⁸⁷ Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, xxiii.

⁵⁸⁸ Ono Sokyō, *Shinto the Kami Way* (Rutland, Vt. and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1962), 8.

The use of the term Shintō to imply doctrinal systems appeared only in the thirteenth century when distinct schools such as Ise Shintō, Ryōbu Shintō and Yoshida Shintō began to emerge.⁵⁸⁹ These schools developed theories of *kami* and spiritual practice variously influenced by imported belief systems. As noted, by the ninth century the theory of *honji suijaku*, under which the *kami* were given Buddhist titles, had already been developed. Fusion with Buddhism appeared even more strongly in Ryōbu Shintō which absorbed some beliefs of Shingon Buddhism,⁵⁹⁰ while Yoshida Shintō drew heavily on Chinese thought (such as *yin-yang* and five-element theory). During the Tokugawa period, the Neo-Confucianism of Chu Hsi (1130-1200) greatly influenced the thought of Shintō scholars such as Yamazaki Ansai (1618-82), founder of Suika Shintō. They in turn influenced scholars of *kokugaku*, such as Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) and Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) who were prominent in the development of Fukko Shintō (Restoration Shintō).⁵⁹¹

By the time of Ueshiba's birth, therefore, the collection of beliefs known as Shintō comprised many diverse elements. During his lifetime, social and political developments led to further complexity in Shintō-based religious systems. First was the creation of a government-directed form of Shintō, known retrospectively as State Shintō (*kokka Shintō*), or alternatively as the emperor-system (*tennō-sei*), because it centred round devotion to the emperor as descendant of the deity Amaterasu ō-mikami (literally "Heaven-shining great kami" although commonly translated "Sun goddess").⁵⁹² This was a politically

⁵⁸⁹ Kasahara, *A History of Japanese Religion*, 299.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 308.

⁵⁹¹ Nobutaka Inoue, "Perspectives toward Understanding the Concept of *Kami*," [Electronic article] (*Kami, Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religion* 4, ed. Nobutaka Inoue, *Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religion* 4, Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, Kokugakuin University, 2000) [accessed on 23 January 2001], available from <http://www.kokugakuin.ac.jp/ijcc/wp/cpjr/kami/intro.html>

⁵⁹² Bocking, *A Popular Dictionary of Shinto*, 3.

oriented Shintō aimed at establishing an ideal unity of government and religion (termed *saisei itchi*, “the unity of Shintō rites and politics”) in which the “civic duty of patriotism” was equated with the “claims and obligations and ecstasies of a living religious faith”.⁵⁹³ Instances can be found where Ueshiba referred to this concept (“aikido has the mission and duty to clarify and teach the true meaning of the union of government and religion”)⁵⁹⁴ but it is unlikely that he gave it the same meaning as that intended by the government.

State Shintō was implemented through a dual policy of diminishing Buddhist influence and imposing an elaborate control structure on Shintō which included the “nationalisation” of the Shintō priesthood (formerly a hereditary office) and the institution of a nationwide shrines’ administration. In 1906 this policy was extended to include shrine mergers which greatly reduced any remaining local control of shrines around which much of rural religious life had centred.⁵⁹⁵ A system of shrine ceremonies was introduced and many festivals connected with local customs were transformed into the rites of State Shintō. Several high-ranking shrines were established for political purposes.⁵⁹⁶

State Shintō, however, was largely based on ritual and offered only a limited metaphysics, which is one of the reasons often given for the growth of the phenomenon known as “new religions”. These began to appear in the late Tokugawa, starting with Nyorai-kyō, followed soon after by Kurozumikyō, Tenrikyō and Konkōkyō,⁵⁹⁷ and then by many others, including Ōmotokyō.

⁵⁹³ Storry, *The Double Patriots*, 2.

⁵⁹⁴ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 1,” 38.

⁵⁹⁵ It is interesting that Ueshiba joined a local political protest against the shrine mergers led by the famous biologist Kumagusu Minakata (1867-1941). See Pranin, *Morihei in Tanabe*.

⁵⁹⁶ Shigeyoshi Murakami, *Japanese Religion in the Modern Century*, trans. H. Byron Earhart (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1980), 21.

⁵⁹⁷ Founded in 1859 by a middle-class farmer, Bunjirō Kawate (1814-83), who believed in Konjin, originally a folk religion deity derived from religious Daoism, Konkōkyō was the religion to which Deguchi Nao, the foundress of Ōmotokyō originally belonged. See Bocking, *A Popular Dictionary of Shinto*, 105.

Their growth was spectacular (the Ministry of Education identified ninety-eight in 1924 and 1,029 in 1935)⁵⁹⁸ and is attributed to multiple causes, such as the changes wrought by the social transformation and Westernisation that Japan was undergoing.⁵⁹⁹ Ueshiba's adherence to Ōmoto should not therefore be considered as a deviation from the norm but rather as the natural response, at a time of exceptional social change, of someone seeking more fulfilling answers than those offered by the prevailing orthodoxy.

The emergence of the new religions provoked a varied government response. Some groups, later known as Sect (Kyōha) Shintō, were officially recognised and integrated into state religious policy. Others (including Ōmotokyō) were less tolerated and their relations with the government often strained to the point of persecution as described in Chapter Two.

Government control of religion continued until the Potsdam Declaration in 1945 after World War II, and the declaration by the Japanese emperor on 1 January 1946 in which he denied his divinity. Throughout most of Ueshiba's life, therefore, official Shintō beliefs were highly politicised and used as an ideological tool to support nationalist enterprises, particularly during the Sino-Japanese war, Russo-Japanese War and before and during World War II.

As a result of their interactive history, there were many points of concordance between State Shintō and the beliefs of the new religions. However, while State Shintō concentrated particularly on shrine ritual and the promotion of Amaterasu as the central deity, the new religions propounded diverse beliefs, often syncretic in nature (merging elements from Buddhism, folk beliefs, and

⁵⁹⁸ Murakami quoted by Sheldon M. Garon in "State and Religion in Imperial Japan, 1912-1945," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 12, no. 2 (Summer) (1986): 286.

⁵⁹⁹ Inoue Nobutaka, "The Formation of Sect Shinto in Modernizing Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, no. 3-4 (2002): 407.

Shingaku),⁶⁰⁰ to which was often added belief in one saviour *kami*,⁶⁰¹ and emphasis on this-worldly benefits and practical solutions to problems of everyday life. They were frequently constituted around a founding figure and worshipped *kami* not mentioned in the *Kojiki* or *Nihon Shoki*.

Aikidō and Ōmotokyō

Explaining Ōmoto's attraction for Ueshiba, Sunadomari Kanemoto said:

The Omoto religion Morihei came to know was not only a religion which cured illnesses. Its teachings were broad and its doctrine profound. It was very different from existing religions. It clearly explained the laws of heaven and earth and the existence of the *kami* (deities). It moreover offered explanations of the divine world, the spiritual world and the phenomenal world beginning with the simplest to the most advanced concepts in such a manner that anyone could understand.⁶⁰²

By the time Ueshiba joined Ōmoto it was already well established and its doctrines had shifted somewhat from their origins in the *kamigakari* (spirit possession) experiences of its founder, Deguchi Nao (1837-1918), the daughter of a carpenter, whose life had been one of abject misery.⁶⁰³ Emily Ooms's study of Nao has shown how Nao's writings (the *Ofudesaki*), produced in states of trance, expressed opposition to the Meiji and Taishō governments which she blamed for her condition of deprivation.⁶⁰⁴ Nao similarly expounded against

⁶⁰⁰ The school of Shingaku (Mind Learning), founded by Ishida Baigan (1685-1744) advocated "a practical moral philosophy, which emphasized frugality, honesty, and forbearance as the virtues to be practiced". See Yusa, *Japanese Religions*, 86-87.

⁶⁰¹ Murakami, *Japanese Religion in the Modern Century*, 12.

⁶⁰² Sunadomari Kanemoto, "Morihei Ueshiba Founder of Aikido," in *Aiki News*, no. 76 (December 1987): 53.

⁶⁰³ According to Emily Ooms, *Kamigakari* has been common in Japanese folk religion since ancient times, with practitioners including professional mediums, shamans, ascetics, and some Buddhist and Shintō priests. See Emily Grosz Ooms, *Women and Millenarian Protest in Meiji Japan Deguchi Nao and Omotokyō*, Cornell East Asia Series (New York: Ithaca, 1993), 5.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 2 and 46.

State Shintō, advocating in its place faith in Ushitora-no-Konjin,⁶⁰⁵ the folk deity by whom she considered herself possessed, and whom she saw as a compassionate *kami* who would usher in an era of world renewal.⁶⁰⁶ The present world was in her eyes “evil” and needed to be destroyed and replaced by a “divine utopia”.⁶⁰⁷

Although this vision of the need to reform the world by reforming oneself through spiritual exercise remained fundamental to Ōmoto, the theory of the means for achieving it was modified under the influence of Deguchi Onisaburō who joined Nao in 1899, bringing erudition, esoteric knowledge and organisational powers to Nao’s group of followers. Onisaburō had a diverse spiritual formation, and was credited with mystical experiences held to have occurred during a week-long asceticism on Mount Takakuma after his father’s death in 1897. Accounts of these may appear incredible to the Western reader, but it has been pointed out that they are in keeping with Japanese shamanic tradition and Shugendō ritual and should not therefore be summarily discounted.⁶⁰⁸ They are, rather, strong indicators of Onisaburō’s immersion in ancient esoteric Japanese spiritual practice which later came to have an important influence on *aikidō*. He had also studied the Japanese classics and poetry with famous scholars, such as Korehira Okada⁶⁰⁹ and Nagasawa Katsutate, a disciple of Honda Chikaatsu (1823-89), a Shintō priest and classical scholar of the school of Hirata Atsutane.

In order to strengthen Ōmoto, in 1906 Onisaburō entered the Kōten Kōkyūkō-shō (Institute for the Study of the Japanese Classics) in Kyoto, and

⁶⁰⁵ Ushitora-no-Konjin is equated with Kunitokotachi no mikoto in the Shintō classics – see Deguchi, *The Great Onisaburo Deguchi*, 40.

⁶⁰⁶ Ooms, *Women and Millenarian Protest in Meiji Japan*, 16-17.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁰⁸ Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow a Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan*, 2nd ed. (London: Unwin Hyman, 1986), 207.

⁶⁰⁹ Deguchi, *The Great Onisaburo Deguchi*, 13.

subsequently passed the examination for the Shintō priesthood. As a result of his efforts, in the next thirteen years, Ōmoto's influence increased enormously; the group attracted students, naval officers, members of the intelligentsia, and acquired ownership of several newspapers.⁶¹⁰

Onisaburō's views of spiritual life are expressed in his massive 81-volume work, the *Reikai Monogatari*, in which he interpreted and elaborated on Nao's writings. He shared Nao's vision of a forthcoming "great cleansing of the world" to prepare for "the advent of a new world",⁶¹¹ and also called for creation of a peaceful society through individual spiritual reform.⁶¹² Unlike Nao, however, he emphasised transformation of the world rather than its destruction as a prerequisite for renewal. The conviction that a new world was to be created on earth was a persistent theme in Onisaburō's discourse and underlay his decision in 1924, after his release on bail following imprisonment after the First Ōmoto Incident, to engage in an expedition to Mongolia to pioneer a new civilisation.⁶¹³

The ideal of individual spiritual renewal as a means of social reconstruction is strongly emphasised in Ueshiba's discourse on *aikidō*. Although the theme of individual spiritual transformation is common to many East Asian religions, Ueshiba's interpretation of it in a social setting can be considered to derive from Ōmoto:

Thus, aikido advances toward the perfection of the entire world in order to establish a Heaven on Earth...Aikido is the Great Way to completely purify the entire world.⁶¹⁴

In Ōmoto, spiritual practice takes place within a community, and cooperation, mutual help and tolerance are ideals that assist the spiritual process.

⁶¹⁰ Among these was the *Taisho Nichinichi Shimbun*. See *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶¹² Ooms, *Women and Millenarian Protest in Meiji Japan*, 88.

⁶¹³ Deguchi, *The Great Onisaburo Deguchi*, 126.

⁶¹⁴ Ueshiba Morihei, "Takemusu aiki 1," 33.

It is clear from numerous accounts that Ueshiba regarded these attitudes as important elements of *aikidō* practice.⁶¹⁵ He does not, however, appear to have considered them as ends in themselves, but only as means to a greater understanding:

I do not deal with human beings. If I really need to express with whom I am dealing, then that will be God [*kamisama*]. Relationships among people in this world do not go well because everyone is dealing with human beings who do and say trivial things to one another.⁶¹⁶

In addition to specific practices which will be mentioned below, another feature of the Ōmoto stance that influenced *aikidō* is undoubtedly its emphasis on art as means of spiritual development. Onisaburō was a prolific artist, producing ceramics and calligraphy at a phenomenal rate. His encouragement of the artistic faculty may well have helped to determine *aikidō*'s evolution as technique of spiritual expression rather than fighting art. That *aikidō* practice can liberate artistic creativity has been well described by Georges Brunon and Pierre Molinari: "in the early stages, the energising effects of aikido transform us. Later, there is a total mutation of one's being which recalls the creative states described by certain artists".⁶¹⁷

Aikidō and kami

One of the strongest indicators of *aikidō*'s spiritual intent is that Ueshiba often described its movements in terms of the action of *kami*, a concept fundamental to all forms of Shintō. In order for this to be understood, some consideration of the concept of *kami*, a term subject to many interpretations, is necessary.

⁶¹⁵ Robert Frager relates an incident where Ueshiba criticised those who were training for lack of the spirit of cooperation. See Perry, *Remembering O-Sensei*, 49-51.

⁶¹⁶ Ueshiba Morihei, "Takemusu aiki 4," 74.

⁶¹⁷ Georges Brunon and Pierre Molinari, *Le Geste créateur et l'aikido* (Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1980), 18.

The Shintō pantheon includes myriads of *kami*, the figure of “eight million” often being given as an indication of their pervasiveness.⁶¹⁸ Although the term *kami* is often translated “god” or “deity”, many scholars consider this rendering inadequate and misleading.⁶¹⁹ *Kami* seem initially to have been considered to be concrete objects such as the sun, moon and stars, while natural phenomena were the actions of *kami* and natural locations (such as mountains, rivers, lakes) the place of their abode. Later, however, they absorbed Chinese and Buddhist concepts, such as ideas from the *I Ching* or the notion of cooperation between *kami* and Buddha to save people.⁶²⁰ Further theoretical explanations of *kami* were elaborated by the Shintō schools of the medieval and Tokugawa periods, while in the Meiji period the perception of *kami* took on more ethical overtones⁶²¹ as a result of the ideology of *saisei itchi* and the introduction of Christianity which accompanied the influx of Western ideas into Japan. In this period, too, a monotheistic view of *kami* (that is, of *kami* as a single flow) became more widespread.

Among the aspects of *kami* of significance for *aikidō* is the view, not of “deity creating or guarding mankind”, or of spirit and matter as fundamentally different, but of *kami* (divine) body and divine spirit as the same: “Divine spirit...in Shinto, does not mean theological omnipotent divinity. Divine spirit in Shinto is the universe in every aspect, seeking self-creative growth, with freedom of choice”.⁶²² A corollary of this explanation is that nature is not *made* by divine spirit, but *is* divine spirit “come forth from subjectivity as the objective universe”.⁶²³ This conception of *kami* holds “that the universe does not originate

⁶¹⁸ Juliet Piggott, *Japanese Mythology* (London: Hamlyn Publishing, 1969), 42.

⁶¹⁹ Mason, *The Meaning of Shinto*, 60.

⁶²⁰ Inoue, “Perspectives toward Understanding the Concept of *Kami*,” 2-3.

⁶²¹ Kasahara, *A History of Japanese Religion*, 536.

⁶²² Mason, *The Meaning of Shinto*, 60-61.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, 62.

in materiality, but matter is an aspect of the immaterial creative spirit".⁶²⁴ Such a concept bears comparison with the understanding of *ki* in Daoism as already described, and explains how Ueshiba could equate the flow of *ki* to the action of *kami*.

Evidence that Ueshiba viewed *kami* in this way is provided by the Ōmoto view of *kami*. As notes to Onisaburō's work *Divine Signposts* indicate, this view included elements of all three of the religious categorisations of monotheism, polytheism and pantheism. It included the ideas of "the original Spirit of the entire universe", "all beings as manifestations of God", and the manifestation of the "Spirit of God" as "part-gods".⁶²⁵ The Ōmoto Maxim and Three Rules of Learning summarises it thus:

God [*kami*] is the spirit which pervades the entire universe, and man is the focus of the workings of heaven and earth. When God and man become one, infinite power will become manifest.

Observing the true form of heaven and earth, we see the substance of the true God.

Seeing the unerring activities of all things, we see the energy of the true God.

Recognizing the essential nature of living beings, we see the spirit of the true God.⁶²⁶

In Shintō, the crucial characteristic of the flow of divine spirit is self-creativity,⁶²⁷ expressed through the concept of *musubi*. This is an ancient term combining the verb "*musu*" (meaning "to beget") with *bi* (= *hi*) meaning the sun, or fire or light.⁶²⁸ It is interpreted as "spirit of birth and becoming" and of "birth,

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 63-65.

⁶²⁵ See note 3 to Onisaburo Deguchi, *Divine Signposts* [Electronic book] (Omoto organisation, [accessed on 2003]), available from <http://www.oomoto.jp/en/Signpost/Forreaders.html>.

⁶²⁶ Deguchi, *The Great Onisaburo Deguchi*, 43.

⁶²⁷ Mason, *The Meaning of Shinto*, 66.

⁶²⁸ Herbert, *Shinto*, 67.

accomplishment, combination” or “the creating and harmonizing powers”.⁶²⁹ *Musubi* reflects the self-creativity of the Universe and in Japanese myths is the action and interaction of many *kami*.⁶³⁰

The fact that Ueshiba used the expression *ki musubi*⁶³¹ to describe the action of *aikidō* is further proof that he saw *aikidō* movements as reflecting the patterns of metaphysical reality as conceived in Shintō rather than as methods of combat. In Shintō mythology, *musubi* is associated particularly with the action of three creator *kami*, Ame-no-minaka-nushi, Takamimusubi-no-mikoto and Kami-musubi-no-mikoto, the first three *kami* to appear in the *Kojiki*.⁶³² The first is the Kami of the Centre of Heaven and the next two are the *kami* of birth and growth. Ueshiba referred frequently to these *kami* whom he described as the givers of life (“*kuni no mioya no inochi*”).⁶³³ For Ueshiba, they represented the action of divine spirit, which was “the combination of *nigen* (two origins), water and fire” which emanate from and return to the “Original Source (*Ichigen*)”.⁶³⁴

While these three deities represented cosmic operations, *aikidō* itself was described in terms of the action of another pair of creator deities, Izanagi no Mikoto and Izanami no Mikoto, “when they gave birth to islands and deities”, again compared to the interaction between fire and water.⁶³⁵ The implication is that *aikidō* performance mirrors the workings of the universe, just as Izanagi and Izanami echo the action of Takamimusubi-no-mikoto and Kami-musubi-no-mikoto. In Shintō myth, Izanagi and Izanami stand on the Floating Bridge of Heaven (*Ame-no-ukihashi*) and dip a jewelled spear into the brine, stirring it and

⁶²⁹ Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, *Basic Terms of Shinto*, Revised ed. (Japan: Kokugakuin University, 1985), 40.

⁶³⁰ Picken, *Essentials of Shinto*, 67.

⁶³¹ Ueshiba, “Mysteries Aikido Okugi (Doka),” 7.

⁶³² Ono, *Shinto the Kami Way*, 4.

⁶³³ Ueshiba Morihei, “O-Sensei’s songs of the way (3),” 38.

⁶³⁴ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 1,” 34.

⁶³⁵ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 2,” 44.

causing an island (Onogoro) to form from the brine that drips off. Ueshiba referred often to this myth in relation to *aikidō*, suggesting that (following Herbert's interpretation of the story as the action of energy, symbolised by the spear, on matter), that one aspect of *aiki* was a conjunction of spirit and matter.⁶³⁶

Musubi, then, is universal activity, the interaction of spirit and matter, the core pattern of universal movement. According to Ueshiba it is mirrored in "*takemusu aiki*", the expression he invented to describe the freely created spontaneous techniques of *aikidō*.⁶³⁷ These techniques manifested unity as "one flow of the world".⁶³⁸ They were interaction "between ki energies",⁶³⁹ and between "the breath of water and the breath of fire in the same manner as the interactions between the Three Deities of the creation".⁶⁴⁰

Ueshiba's descriptions of *musubi* present a picture of a state of being similar to the creative consciousness which manifests in Zen Buddhism when discursive thought stops, or to the effect produced by the perfect harmonising of *yin* and *yang* in Inner Alchemy Daoism.

***Aikidō* and the spiritual practices of Shintō**

In traditional Shintō, the main aim of spiritual practice is an internal transformation termed "pacifying the soul" (*mitama-shizume, chin-kon*),⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁶ Herbert, *Shinto*, 253-5.

⁶³⁷ According to Abe Seiseki, Ueshiba composed this term by combining the characters *bu* 武 (which can also be pronounced "*take*") and *san* (産 meaning "to produce, bear or yield" but not usually pronounced "*musu*"). In choosing the character *san*, Ueshiba appears to have wanted to give the term a spiritual connotation since *san* is used in the Ōmoto religion in connection with the word *rei* ("soul" or "spirit") to mean "spirit-producing". See Ueshiba Morihei, Abe Seiseki ed., "Mysteries Aikido Okugi (Doka)," 15.

⁶³⁸ Ueshiba Morihei, "Takemusu aiki 3," 58.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 57.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁶⁴¹ Herbert, *Shinto*, 79.

which culminates in proximity to Ame-no-minaka-nushi, the “universal Kami”, that is attainment of a state in which “all distinction between oneself and others disappears, when other men, family, Society, the State, Nature, the whole Universe, become identical with oneself”.⁶⁴² Although the term *chin-kon* is not used in *aikidō*, it is a form of meditation which has similarities with *zazen*, whose affinity with *aikidō* has been shown (see photograph of Ueshiba practising *chin-kon* in Appendix 2, Figure 2, page 168).

Another form of practice for calming the soul, however, known as *otoritsugi*, which Onisaburō introduced into Ōmoto in 1923, has a clear affinity with *aikidō* practice. This exercise is conducted by an experienced practitioner who acts as an agent or intermediary (*otoritsugi*) in transmitting divine protection to a person complaining of spiritual or physical disorder. The practitioner does not touch the body of the person for whom *otoritsugi* is performed but maintains a certain distance while pronouncing *norito*, singing *sanbika*, or reading aloud from Ōmoto's scriptures. The practitioner must act “calmly, unhurriedly, and flowingly, to become the agent of the hand of divine spirit, to transmit spiritual flow, spiritual ki, spiritual light, to the recipient”.⁶⁴³ This description vividly recalls Ueshiba's method of throwing his partners in *aikidō* without touching them and their recollections of the feeling of wellbeing which ensued.

Preparation for *chin-kon* includes various exercises, such as *misogi* and *harai*. In Shintō ritual, *misogi* means purifying the mind and body by the use of water, in a river or the sea, or spiritual discipline in general. *Harai* connotes purification by other methods, such as through ceremonies and prayer. Both are linked to Shintō *shugyō* (austere training) which includes “water-fall ablution,

⁶⁴² Ibid., 90.

⁶⁴³ Charles Rowe, e-mail to the author, 23 December 2003.

mountain-climbing, fasting and others”,⁶⁴⁴ all practices that Ueshiba engaged in regularly.

Ueshiba considered the idea of *misogi* as fundamental to *aikidō*:

all my techniques are purification (*misogi*)...From my point of view, aiki is a great purification, a wonderful, healthy method, and a Grand Way to bear and cultivate all things in nature.⁶⁴⁵

Evidence for this is found not only in his discourse but also in the direct importation of elements of Shintō *misogi* ritual into *aikidō*. These include the *misogi* preparatory exercises of *furitama* (“soul-shaking” – an exercise in which the hands are clasped and shaken in front of the belly with the purpose of creating awareness of the soul within oneself), and *torifune* (“bird-rowing”), a rowing exercise from a standing position whose aim is to put the body in a state of readiness (the mind having already been attuned by *furitama*).⁶⁴⁶ A description of Ueshiba’s performance of the latter, which in *aikidō* is known as *funekogi*, is provided by Tsuda Itsuo who makes clear that Ueshiba regarded it as a spiritual activity.⁶⁴⁷ Ueshiba was also fond of comparing *aikidō* practice with the incident in Shintō myth when Izanagi no Mikoto performed *misogi* to purify his body by thrashing about in water at a place called Odo, purifying himself after journeying in the underworld. *Aikidō* techniques are referred to as “*Odo no kamuwaza*”, or “the divine techniques of Odo”.

Misogi includes both physical and mental elements, such as cleansing the body through washing and breathing exercises and purifying the heart and the

⁶⁴⁴ Kishimoto Hideo, quoted in Herbert, *Shinto*, 80.

⁶⁴⁵ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 3,” 58.

⁶⁴⁶ “Spiritual exercises” in Yukitaka (Guji) Yamamoto, *Kami No Michi the Life and Thought of a Shinto Priest* [Electronic book] (Tsubaki America, 1988[accessed on 2003]), available from http://www.csuchico.edu/~georgew/tsa/Kami_no_Michi_ToC.html.

⁶⁴⁷ Tsuda Itsuo, *La Science du particulier, Ecole de la Respiration* (Paris: Le Courrier du Livre, 1976), 128-30.

environment with bright, encouraging words.⁶⁴⁸ Although Ueshiba did not explain precisely how *aikidō* functioned as *misogi*, it can be deduced that purification meant for him dilution of consciousness of the ego-self and that he saw *aikidō* practice as performing this function: "Before God we must give up our ego, freeing our mind of all thoughts and endeavor to be able to execute divine deeds by calming our spirit (kon) and returning to God."⁶⁴⁹ That Ueshiba understood *misogi* in this way is suggested by the names and myths surrounding the three guardian *kami* of *aikidō*. The first is Sarutahiko, who, according to myth, guided Prince Ninigi during his descent to earth,⁶⁵⁰ and can thus be seen to represent the way of virtue. Second is Ame-no-Tajikara-wo-no-kami, who drew Amaterasu out of the cave where she had hidden, an action which suggests effort to achieve enlightenment.⁶⁵¹ The third is Masakatsu Agatsu Katsuhayabi, who represents victory over the self.⁶⁵²

In short, Aikido is a method of *misogi* (ritual purification). Through the technique of *misogi* you should continually forge the Great Spirit of Love and Protection toward all things while protecting the logical sequence of the multitudes of gods and all creation. Thus, you can finally accomplish your own mission. You must assume the stance revealed in the spirit of Masakatsu, Agatsu and Katsuhayabi.⁶⁵³

That Ueshiba intended overcoming of the ego-self to be paramount in *aikidō* is also shown through the integration into *aikidō* of the Shintō values of *makoto* (sincerity) and *akaki* (cheerfulness). Although *makoto* is translated "sincerity", it has wider connotations than the English term and has been described as "a sincere approach to life", "awareness of the Divine", "honesty,

⁶⁴⁸ Herbert, *Shinto*, 79.

⁶⁴⁹ Ueshiba Morihei, "Takemusu aiki 1," 29.

⁶⁵⁰ Bocking, *A Popular Dictionary of Shinto*, 155.

⁶⁵¹ Herbert, *Shinto*, 308.

⁶⁵² Ueshiba Morihei, "Mysteries Aikido Okugi (Doka)," 16, n. 32.

⁶⁵³ Ueshiba Morihei, "Excerpts from the Writings," 4.

i.e. careful avoidance of ‘error in word or deed’”.⁶⁵⁴ The practice of *makoto* is held to lead to *wa*, the Japanese concept of “harmonious coexistence”. That Ueshiba associated *makoto* with martial arts’ practice is clearly stated here:

A person who would serve the “Way of Bu” at all should from the beginning to the end only pray to the genuine god, build virtue, and sincerely study Bu. That is, through training Bu he must purify his body and mind and attain a “sincere spirit/mind” (*magokoro*).⁶⁵⁵

There is also no doubt that he understood the practice of *makoto* to entail dissolution of the ego: “When you offer a *sincere* prayer, there is no ego in it. All attachments disappear and are transformed into light [my italics]”.⁶⁵⁶

Akaki is “purity and cheerfulness of heart” which accompanies *makoto* and *wa*.⁶⁵⁷ It was a prominent feature of Ueshiba’s vision of *aikidō* as indicated in his declaration, “I can imagine no happier sight than to see that all of us have trained joyfully”.⁶⁵⁸ It is also apparent in this exhortation where it is associated with *wa*: “we must accord to each mountain, river, plant, tree, insect, fish and animal its own place, and enjoy ourselves together. This is aikido”.⁶⁵⁹

As has been observed, apprehension of reality through eliminating ego-consciousness is a persistent theme in East Asian religion. It is realised in Zen, for example, by stilling the mind, in Shingon by transforming the mind through visualisation, and in Daoism by coordinating the action of mind and body so as to perceive life as a single flow and dissolve the apparent barrier of physical form. In all these practices, the result is an evaporation of subjectivity such that

⁶⁵⁴ Herbert, *Shinto*, 71-72.

⁶⁵⁵ Ueshiba Morihei, “A Lecture by President Ueshiba O-Sensei ‘Kannagara No Jutsu’ (The Art of Shinto),” 20.

⁶⁵⁶ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 2,” 47.

⁶⁵⁷ Herbert, *Shinto*, 71-73.

⁶⁵⁸ Ueshiba Morihei, “Excerpts from the Writings,” 5.

⁶⁵⁹ Ueshiba Morihei, “Takemusu aiki 4,” 80.

the mind is completely transparent, a state described through the metaphors of "Spirit of Moon/spirit of water".⁶⁶⁰ Ueshiba appears to have seen *aikidō* as leading towards a similar result through creation of a perfectly balanced inner-outer harmony such that one's mind perceives no difference between oneself and the external world. This was what *misogi* led to, and the method *par excellence* for achieving it in *aikidō* was through the application of the ancient Shintō science of *kotodama*. *Kotodama* can thus be seen as a kind of elaboration of *misogi* theory.

Aikidō and kotodama

The term *kotodama* is often translated as "the spirit of [the Japanese] language"⁶⁶¹ but is here considered rather as a science of sacred sound. Ueshiba reportedly learnt *kotodama* from Deguchi whose grandmother had been taught by a scholar named Kodo Nakamura.⁶⁶² According to several accounts, Deguchi's interpretation of *kotodama* inspired a new direction in Ueshiba's art and provided the crucial link between the martial arts and Japan's spiritual traditions which he was seeking.

Kotodama, described as an ancient idea which holds that enunciation of the syllables of the Japanese language has a spiritual effect, is usually discussed by modern scholars within the discipline of linguistics. Their conclusion has tended to be that there is no evidence of any unique property of the Japanese language warranting the designation of "spirit". Such views, however, ignore the pivotal role played by sound in many of the world's mystical traditions, the most outstanding example of which is the esoteric significance of intoning the Sanskrit word OM.⁶⁶³ As at least one scholar has observed, adherents of the

⁶⁶⁰ Protin, *Aikido un art martial*, 172-73.

⁶⁶¹ This is the translation given by Roy Andrew Miller, "The 'Spirit' of the Japanese Language," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 3, no. 2 (1977): 252.

⁶⁶² Deguchi, *The Great Onisaburo Deguchi*, 7.

⁶⁶³ OM (also AUM), written in Sanskrit letters, is a symbol of form representing the worlds of the physical, mental and unconscious and supreme consciousness. It is also used as a mantric syllable

linguistic argument against *kotodama* are denying “a direct correspondence between language and reality, word and object” and thereby putting forward a “disenchanted” view of language as “successfully purged” of “religious and ritual resonances”.⁶⁶⁴

Kotodama has also featured in academic debate concerning Japanese political ideology. As the concept is associated with the pronunciation of native Japanese words extant before the introduction of Chinese culture into Japan, *kotodama* was particularly espoused by the Japanese *kokugaku* (“nativist”) school of learning and from there was absorbed into nationalistic ideology. Because of this, Ueshiba’s teachings about *kotodama* risk being dismissed as ultranationalist cant. An alternative view, however, is that the adoption of *kotodama* by Japanese ultranationalists in the 1930s was a distortion of its true function, and that a concept which has such an ancient history warrants greater academic consideration.⁶⁶⁵ Adherents of the latter view point to its use in the ancient poetic texts of the *Man’yōshū* where it is written in Chinese characters meaning either “words, speech” or “affair, matter” with “spirit of a being that acts upon others; divine”, a juxtaposition suggestive of a relation between sound and phenomenal reality.⁶⁶⁶

Given the paucity of reference to *kotodama* theory in works in English on Shintō, it would appear that the application of *kotodama* as esoteric religious practice is not well known outside Japan. This is not surprising, given the nature of this teaching, which is at once experiential and by tradition passed on only to

in Buddhism but with a different meaning. See Schuhmacher and Woerner (eds.), *The Rider Encyclopedia*, 254-55.

⁶⁶⁴ Cody M. Poulton, “Words with Power: Kotodama Reconsidered,” in *Proceedings of the Kyoto Conference on Japanese Studies 1994* (International Research Center for Japanese Studies/Japan Foundation, 1996), 186-87.

⁶⁶⁵ Miller, “The ‘Spirit’ of the Japanese Language,” 257.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 262.

initiates. In relation to *aikidō* only a few authors have written about it in any depth.⁶⁶⁷

The concept of *kotodama* is wound into Shintō in more ways than are immediately apparent, however. It can be found, for instance, incorporated into the symbolism of the grounds of Ise Shrine where “the river that runs through the grounds is called Usuzu Gawa, the river of fifty bells, symbolizing the vibrations of universal creation”.⁶⁶⁸ It is also related to the chanting of the invocations called *norito*,⁶⁶⁹ and is linked to Shintō mythology through the idea that each sound of the *kotodama* is also a *kami*.⁶⁷⁰

Although *kotodama* is usually characterised as a Shintōist concept, similarities have been observed with Buddhist concepts of language, particularly those of Shingon (whose name in Japanese means “true word”) which places great importance on “words” and includes incantation of *mantras* as one of its main practices. The amalgamation of Shintō thought with that of Shingon as exemplified in Ryōbu Shintō also suggests an interaction between the practices of the two schools. This parallel is noted, for example, by Fred Little, in his study of the concept of *kotodama* in relation to *aikidō*.⁶⁷¹ Little has gone as far as to suggest that Ueshiba’s use of *kotodama* theory was a reworking of Kūkai’s Shingon system, even though Ueshiba himself probably regarded *kotodama* as derived purely from indigenous tradition. Ueshiba spoke extensively about

⁶⁶⁷ William Gleason, Nakazono Masahilo and Sunadomari Kanemoto are the main sources. Nakazono learnt *aikidō* from Ueshiba Morihei and became an *aikidō* teacher in Britain and France. He subsequently established the Kototama Institute in Santa Fe, United States, and wrote several books on *kotodama*.

⁶⁶⁸ Gleason, *The Spiritual Foundations of Aikido*, 47.

⁶⁶⁹ Herbert, *Shinto*, 39.

⁶⁷⁰ Gleason, *The Spiritual Foundations of Aikido*, 48.

⁶⁷¹ Fred Little, *Mantrayana and Koto(Dama/Tama): A Suggestive Mapping (1.1) Interstitial Poetry by Kukai* [Electronic article] (The Aikido FAQ, 1994 [accessed on 2002]), available from http://www.aikidofaq.com/philosophy/a_section12.html.

kotodama which he regarded as the very foundation of *aikidō*. He also incorporated its principles into the layout of the Aiki Shrine at Iwama.⁶⁷²

Ueshiba studied *kotodama* with the Ōmoto organisation where it was used to describe an entire ontology based on an understanding of the ultimate nature of the universe as evolving silently from the void and gradually taking perceptible form as vibration. *Kotodama* as spiritual practice involves intoning the vowels (A O U E I) and syllables (Hi, Ni, Si, Ri, T, Yi, Ki, Mi) of the Japanese language in specific orders and combinations. It is not, however, merely a theory of sound but rather a theory of sound as the manifestation of the invisible structure of the Universe. Rinjiro Shirata explains:

Kotodama is not sounds. It is the echo of ki which preceeds [sic] the emergence of sounds. Sounds are the next stage. *Kotodama* comes first and preceding it there is ki. Ki changes into many forms. It becomes sound, light and *kokyu* (breath). When two sources of ki combine this results in *kokyu*. While breathing it becomes sound, light, *kotodama* and many things.⁶⁷³

It is apparent from Ueshiba's lectures and writings that he understood *kotodama* as reflecting the structure of cosmic action and the purpose of practising it was to effect a readjustment of awareness. This would provide direct experience of universal reality ("If you really look into yourself, you will understand this by perceiving the vibrations of sounds...Above all, aikido emanates from within the vibrations of sounds").⁶⁷⁴ This realisation could only occur, however, through a particular conjunction of vocalisation with an attitude of body and mind, as is clear from Nakazono's descriptions of the relationship of sounds to one's inner senses.⁶⁷⁵ That is, the practitioner must observe the quality of the sound that emanates from his or her intonation and make efforts to

⁶⁷² Ueshiba Morihei, *Budo: Teachings of the Founder of Aikido*, trans. John Stevens (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1991), 18-19.

⁶⁷³ Shirata Rinjiro, "Interview with Rinjiro Shirata (2)," *Aiki News* no. 63 (September 1984), 7.

⁶⁷⁴ Ueshiba Morihei, "Takemusu aiki 4," 79.

⁶⁷⁵ Masahilo Nakazono, *The Kototama Principle* (Santa Fe: Kototama Institute, 1984), 27.

discover the cause of any discordance. It is not, therefore, a question merely of intoning sounds but also of directing one's attention to both the effect and timbre of vocalisation.

Ueshiba's originality was in applying *kotodama* to *aikidō*, in which endeavour he appears to have been inspired by the method of conjunction of body, speech and mind used in Shingon spiritual practice. Several observers describe him as accompanying *aikidō* movements with the *kotodama* sounds and his *aikidō* movements as being "full of the rhythms and rites of his original Shinto which he executed with ease".⁶⁷⁶

The following extract shows how, in his view, *kotodama* provided an explanatory framework for *aikidō*:

In the beginning was the original force which we call "ki". This force manifested itself by a sound or "word" and created the world in which we live...The rhythmic movements that I perform with the accompaniment of sounds show that in each movement I absorb and throw out cosmic energy. Understand the relationships of the sounds by incorporating them into the body techniques of aikido.⁶⁷⁷

Ueshiba described *aikidō* as "a form which manifests the Single Soul, the Four Spirits, the Three Origins and the Eight Powers",⁶⁷⁸ an expression traditionally used in Shintō to describe *kotodama*.⁶⁷⁹ To understand the meaning of this expression, some appreciation of Shintō's account of the constitution of the human being is necessary.

In Shintō, as Gleason explains, the human person is understood as composed of materiality (*mono*) and spirituality (*tama*), both of which have equal value. The *tama* includes four different aspects of being, known as the

⁶⁷⁶ Cauhépé and Kuang, *Les Arts martiaux intériorisés*, 37.

⁶⁷⁷ Nocquet, *Maître Morihei Uyeshiba présence et message*, 77-78.

⁶⁷⁸ Ueshiba Morihei, "Excerpts from the Writings," 6.

⁶⁷⁹ Gleason, *The Spiritual Foundations of Aikido*, 2.

“Four Spirits (or Souls)”: *aramitama*, *nigimitama*, *sakimitama* and *kushimitama*. The Four Souls are associated with different attitudes of mind which, when perfectly harmonised, lead to a spontaneous direct link with divine consciousness, the “One Spirit” (*naohi*). *Aramitama* is symbolised by fire, which “creates a joyful and energetic nature”, *nigimitama* by water, which creates the “gentle power necessary for harmonious unification and reconciliation”, *sakimitama* by earth, the energy of growth, generation and development, while *kushimitama* is perfect wisdom, “our true nature, beyond personality and ego”, that which “creates direct perception, unhindered by emotional judgement”.⁶⁸⁰

As Nakazono’s explanations indicate, harmonious development of the Four Souls is achieved in *kotodama* practice by the intonement of purified sounds, that is vocalisation unmediated by interference from negative emotion. The sustained exercise to emit pure sounds is portrayed as an exercise of internal exploration, a meditation, through which subtle universal processes can be intuited.

The harmonising of attitudes, experienced at a profound level, is a harmonising with the invisible form that precedes universal rhythmic vibration. It is not a static, one-time, harmonisation, however, but a continual attuning to the intuited flow of life. Through enunciation of sounds in various patterns, or, in *aikidō*, enactment of certain sequences of movement, with appropriately focused concentration and intent, the practitioner of *kotodama* mirrors the invisible operation of the cosmos in its creative action. Ueshiba referred to its application in *aikidō* thus:

these applied techniques [of *aikidō*] also display the marvelous functioning of *kotodama*, the principle that directs and harmonizes all things in the world, resulting in the unification of heaven, earth, god, and humankind.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., 77-86.

⁶⁸¹ Ueshiba Morihei, *Budo*, 27.

The movements of *aikidō* themselves appear to have been intended to perform the same function as the sound. This explains the wavelike nature of *aikidō* movement and its permutations which provide a number of variant foundational rhythms.

Although it is impossible to determine, other than by direct experience, how Ueshiba achieved the correlation between movement and sound, it appears to have been through a literal application of the movements symbolised in the Shintō cosmogony by the Eight Powers (*hachiriki*). These are: *do* (action, movement), *sei* (stillness), *kai* (dissolving), *gyo* (consolidating), *in* (drawing out), *shi* (drawing in), *go* (combining), *bu* (separation).⁶⁸² In other words, when the whole body and mind moved in harmony with these principles of movement, the harmonised motion would have the same effect as sequences of sound on one's state of consciousness.

Some idea of how the connection may have been made is provided by Sugawara Tetsutaka's description of how Ueshiba created a sequence of movements with the *jo* (staff) by combining *kotodama* with the movements of *kagura* (Shintō sacred dance):

He thought that the *kotodama* sounds were very important. Each sound represents a different type of friction, each is a way that intrinsic energy [*ki*] moves, and a different way of moving in the martial arts. So this is where aikido came from. This kind of thing recognizes natural movement and how one form changes into another. Out of one thing, many things are born. This kind of natural change is creation.⁶⁸³

As in Daoism and Shingon, *kotodama* interprets the human being as a vortex of *ki* energies continually interacting with cosmic energies. These energies constitute the different dimensions of the human person, some visible

⁶⁸² Sunadomari Kanemoto 砂泊兼基. 合気道開祖植芝盛平 (*Aikidō kaiso Ueshiba Morihei*). (Kodansha, 1969), 213.

⁶⁸³ Dykhuizen, "Sugawara Tetsutaka," 78.

(that is, the physical body) and some invisible, such as emotion, aspiration and intuition. The way in which they function is described in the imagery of “One Spirit, Four Souls, Three Origins, and Eight Powers” which provides a framework for the human person to understand his or her own nature and adjust it in accordance with universal truth. The Eight Powers represent the *yin* and *yang* action of the Four Souls and the aim is to keep them in harmonious tension. *Aramitama*’s *yang* action, for example, is anger which must be attenuated by this Soul’s *yin* action: capacity for judgement. It is thus a kind of system of “checks and balances” designed to prevent the imbalance which produces distorted thinking and action (based on a mistaken perception of reality) and in consequence, internal conflict, unease resulting from “the mind of doubt”,⁶⁸⁴ unhappiness and sense of separation. Harmony would result in development of the heart-mind: “Kokoro is produced by the Four Souls. Naohi and the Four Souls are absolute reality and a natural gift. If you obey the right balance honestly, your heart-mind will come direct from Nature. If your mind works properly, the working of the Four Souls will connect with *naohi*.”⁶⁸⁵

Ueshiba appears to have seen *aikidō* as a similar system of “checks and balances” which the practitioner could engage in directly. *Aikidō* provides a method of “blending our own ki with the kototama and universal order”⁶⁸⁶ and thus enables one to “experience the spiritual content of apparent reality”.⁶⁸⁷ For Ueshiba, *aikidō* was thus a practice in alignment with universal order as described in *kotodama* theory, an alignment which, in his view, resulted in correct understanding of the nature of reality. It is in this sense that *aikidō* could act as *misogi*, where purification meant purging of mistaken views.

⁶⁸⁴ Gleason, *The Spiritual Foundations of Aikido*, 5.

⁶⁸⁵ Sunadomari, *Aikido Kaiso Ueshiba Morihei*, 220.

⁶⁸⁶ Gleason, *The Spiritual Foundations of Aikido*, 17.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

To study *kotodama* is, in Nakazono's words, "to practice returning to pure consciousness".⁶⁸⁸ This is how Ueshiba appears to have perceived it. By extension, *aikidō* was for him an exercise aimed, like the spiritual techniques of Buddhism and Daoism, at intuiting the pure ground of being. It was a way to merge with divine spirit, a state in which no differentiation between subject and object was made.

⁶⁸⁸ Little, *Mantrayana and Koto(Dama/Tama)* .

Conclusion

Using the example of *aikidō*, this research set out to demonstrate how spirituality is possible in a Japanese martial art. It defined spirituality in two ways (see page 8), as a state of being, “a state of interconnectedness with the Other – the divine, the self, the human, the natural, or any combination thereof – resulting in a state of security with a sense of worthwhile purpose” and as a process, “the search for connection with one’s true self and with a core reality that gives value and meaning to life”. The purpose was to refute the arguments of some scholars that spirituality in the martial arts has no real substance, and to situate the art of *aikidō* within the context of established East Asian spiritual traditions. Although a few works on the spiritual aspects of *aikidō* have been published, no synthesis of Ueshiba’s teaching such as this had been undertaken before, and no systematic comparison with Japanese religious practices conducted.

After considering some of the conceptual barriers to understanding spirituality in the martial arts, the study analysed the main components of Japanese spirituality in order to determine how ultimate reality is envisaged in its traditions and what would constitute action and intent directed toward a core, or ultimate, concern as required by the definition adopted in the project. It then reviewed the events of Ueshiba’s life which led to the maturation of *aikidō* as a new form of martial art after World War II, and showed how his lectures and writings were principally concerned with understanding the nature of reality as conceived of in the Japanese religious traditions, rather than with, for example, nationalist goals or combat strategy.

The study showed that Ueshiba’s personal quest was motivated by the determination to find an alternative to “destroying the aggressiveness of an opponent by destroying the adversary”,⁶⁸⁹ which led him to explore through direct experience the nature of physical force. At a time when, under the pressure

⁶⁸⁹ Nocquet, *Maître Morihei Ueshiba présence et message*, 47

of exposure to Western ways of thinking and doing, Japan was questioning its traditional values and seeking to adapt to the modern world, Ueshiba conducted his own personal experiment in understanding the mind-matter relationship, which led him to investigate the nature of reality.

Next, the study considered Ueshiba's experiment in the context of four principal religious traditions which have influenced Japanese thought systems in order to show how the main purpose of *aikidō* training, in the way that Ueshiba used it, was to reveal to the practitioner the nature of reality as conceived of in these traditions. It showed that Ueshiba's interpretation of the concept of *aiki* was a form of non-dual knowledge in keeping with the core teaching of the four belief-systems being considered. From the ontological point of view, the prime teachings of Ueshiba's *aikidō* can be said to be that reality is a unifying, constantly permutating, creative and benevolent force with which the human person can totally identify through the dissolution of egoic boundaries.

Some might say that Ueshiba's creation was a mere surface pastiche of practices and ideas from different traditions. The evidence from his life and *aikidō* performance, however, suggests that *aikidō*'s syncretism resulted rather from his realisation of the underlying compatibility of these traditions. In other words, in Ueshiba's *aikidō*, the Daoist view of permutating *ki*, the Shintō view of life as a single flow of the action of *kami*, the Buddhist views of the Buddha's cosmic body, the Emptiness of phenomena and interdependence of being, were shown to be different refractions of the same truth. It is in this sense that he could say *aikidō* is "a guide which leads incomplete religion to perfection" (see page 1). Expressed in the terms of the definition of spirituality adopted here, Ueshiba's *aikidō* combined interconnectedness with the divine (conceived as *kami* or the Buddha-body), with one's true self (through apprehension of Emptiness or Buddha-nature) and with the natural (through perception of *ki* as living force). By its application of this understanding to the realm of human relations, it offered "a sense of worthwhile purpose".

Aikidō as he conceived it offered the possibility of apprehending underlying unity by means of a method which revealed the interrelation of mind and matter, the immateriality of objects, the transience of experience and the obstacles to direct perception raised by discursive thought. Evidence was given to show that in achieving this Ueshiba's *aikidō* employed a number of well-established East Asian techniques of spiritual practice. In some cases, techniques (such as *furi-tama*) were incorporated directly, while in others the principle was adapted (such as *kotodama* or Shingon visualisations).

The *aikidō* Ueshiba created after intense soul-searching during World War II, an era of epic-making destructiveness in human relations, owed much to the practices of Japanese religions, but did not require adherence to any. Its fundamental tenet was the creation of harmony within oneself, which would lead both to transcendent knowledge and harmony with others.

Although it may appear that Ueshiba was wholly influenced by the past, many have described his creation as remarkably well suited to the spiritual needs of the present age. André Cognard, for instance, observed that in the twenty-first century, when ideology propagated through invasive technological media weighs upon us,⁶⁹⁰ Ueshiba's *aikidō* offers a liberating kind of learning. In its emphasis on direct experience, on the dismantling of habits of thought and prejudices and restoration of natural rhythms, it is unconstraining. Moreover, *aikidō* practice is a connecting activity which, in a world of increasing individual isolation and alienation, has a reconstructive effect. In keeping with the Japanese tradition, it is also a technique of spiritual development amenable to practice in everyday life, because the understanding of the mind's transformability is independent of location.

⁶⁹⁰ André Cognard, "Civilisation et arts martiaux ou le noeud de la ceinture," 14.

The method adopted in this study of comparing *aikidō* intent and practice, seen mostly through the eyes of its founder, but also through those of some insightful practitioners, to the aims and instruments of Japanese religions, proved fruitful in identifying the many strands of influence in *aikidō*. It has also contributed to unravelling the meaning of some of Ueshiba's esoteric language which needs to be read within the context of Japanese religions. Within the scope of an MA dissertation, treatment of these religions has necessarily been brief and there is unquestionably opportunity for much profounder investigation. These may also increase as new sources of information become available. The public release of back issues of *Aikidō Shimbun* (the newsletter of the *aikidō* headquarters) on CD-Rom in November 2003, for example, came too late for this study but would be a valuable source of information for further research.

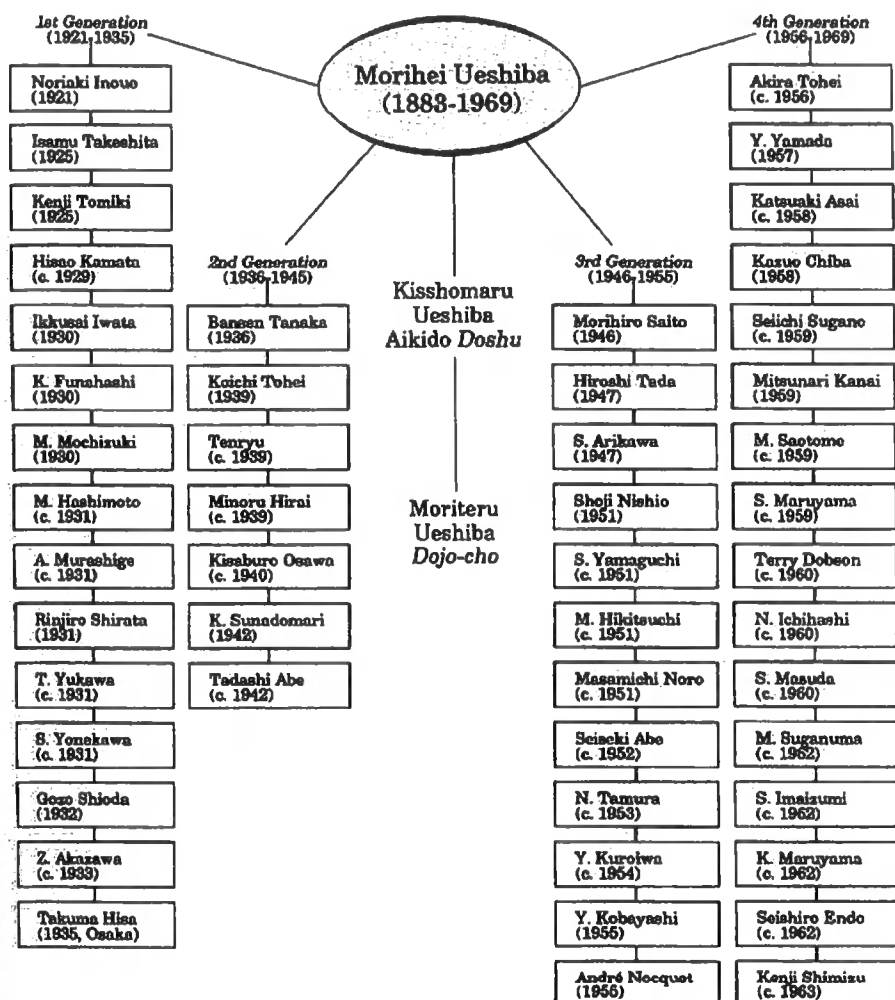
In addition to demonstrating the concordance between *aikidō* performance and Japanese spiritual practice, the research also showed how academic study of a martial art can provide supporting evidence to prove, or disprove, correlations between religious beliefs. For instance, the congruence of kundalinī yoga and Inner Alchemy Daoism is manifested in *aikidō*. It also highlighted the importance of the concept of *ki* as a unifying factor in East Asian spiritual thought.

Two important questions remain. First, since *aikidō* in its genesis was an art of harmonising opposites, achieving balance and peaceful reconciliation, one might legitimately ask if it is really accurate to call it a "martial" art. The question becomes even more pressing when it is realised, as shown, that the prime teaching of *aiki* is the immateriality of objects, the transience of experience and the obstacles to direct perception raised by discursive thought. Second, since *aikidō* has travelled outside Japan, a prime consideration is to what extent it has retained the elements which made it, for its founder, a spiritual pursuit. *Aikidō* is now taught differently by many teachers with differing motivations. Codification and theoretical explanation of techniques, emphasis on

teaching qualifications and possible introduction of competition are all extraneous to the original art. Ueshiba claimed that the principles of *aikidō* were universal and not dependent on a single culture, but in this he was assuming a cultural orientation which would value these principles. On the other hand, it should not be assumed that just because the traditions which influenced *aikidō* were Japanese the knowledge they led to was dependent on the Japanese cultural setting. Ueshiba's claim was that *aikidō* offered a means by which anyone could explore and discover for themselves the nature of being. Nevertheless, while undeniably non-sectarian, *aikidō* does require faith of a kind, in commitment to non-aggression and in the ground of being as a benevolent, harmonious, continually self-creating force.

Appendix 1

The Students of Morihei Ueshiba



(The above chart shows the major students of aikido founder Morihei Ueshiba during the various phases of his teaching career. Dates in parentheses indicate the year the individual in question began training under Ueshiba.)

Stanley A. Pranin, The Aiki News Encyclopedia of Aikido (Tokyo: Aiki News, 1991), p.129.

© Stanley A. Pranin, 1991

Appendix 2



Figure 1 Ueshiba Morihei, founder of *aikido*

© SGS Aikido, France



Figure 2 Ueshiba Morihei (right) performing *chinkon kishin* © Aiki News



Figure 3 Ueshiba's calligraphy tracing the name of the *kami* Masakatsu Agatsu Katsuhayabi

© Aikido Journal

Appendix 2

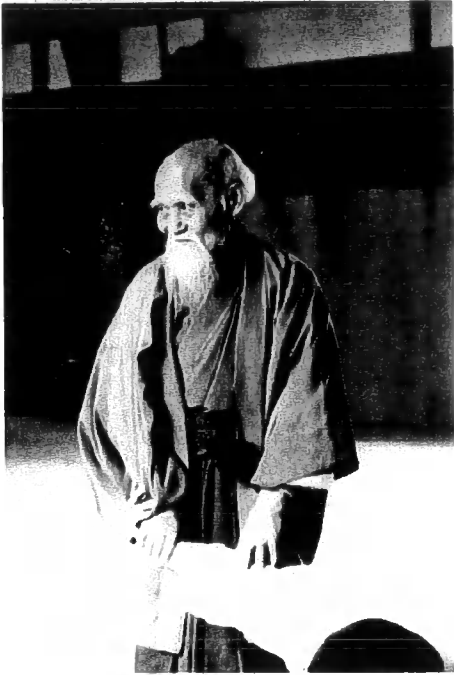


Figure 4 Ueshiba Morihei performing *ikkyō*

© SGS Aikido, France



Figure 5 Ueshiba Morihei performing a *kokyū-nage* (breath throw)

© SGS Aikido, France

Appendix 2



Figure 6 Ueshiba Morihei executing a technique without touching

© Grass Valley Aikikai, United States Aikido Federation



Figure 7 Ueshiba honouring the spirit of *aiki* © SGS Aikido, France



Figure 8 Omoto organisation centre at Ayabe

© Omoto organisation



Figure 9 Ueshiba Morihei revering Amaterasu 5-mikami

© Nippon Kan Aikido

Appendix 3

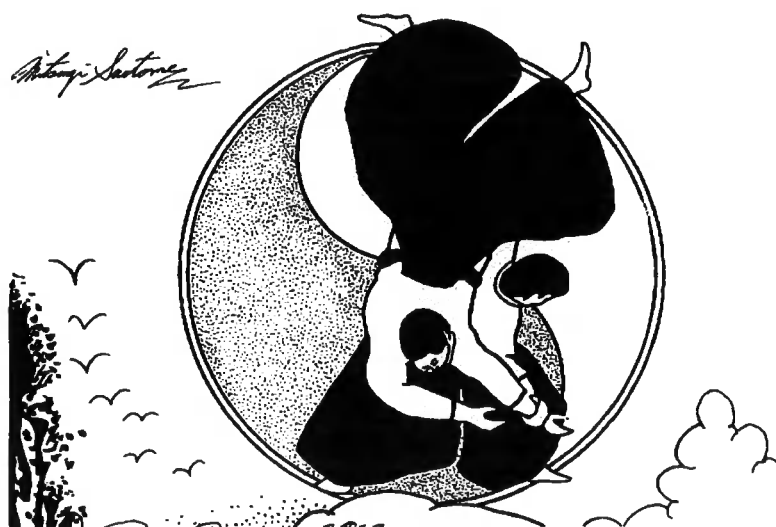
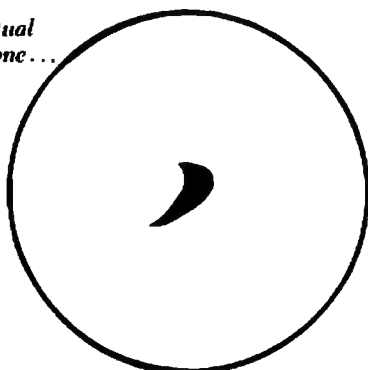
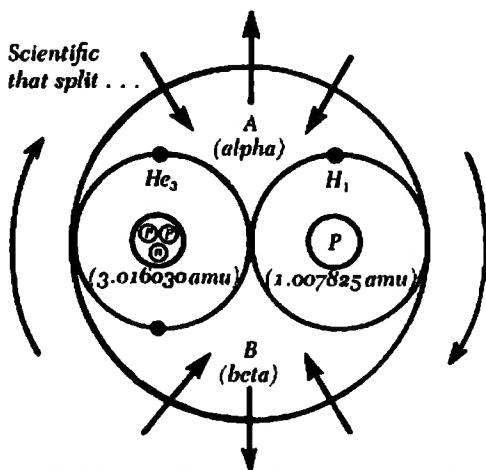


Figure 10 *Koshinage*, the living symbols of yin and yang, from Saotome Mitsugi *Aikido and the Harmony of Nature* (Boston & London: Shambhala Publications, 1993), pp. 24-25

Spiritual
The one ...

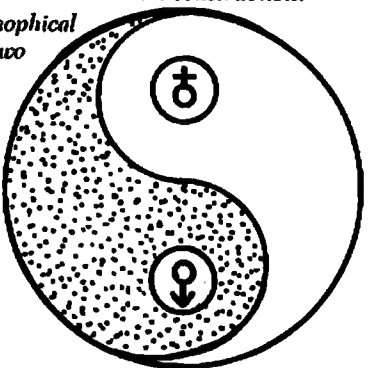


Scientific
that split ...



Interaction of hydrogen and helium atoms in
the beginning stages of
universal construction.

Philosophical
into two



Positive and negative forces; the two faces of God

Symbol of the creator (center) of the universe.
This is the symbol for the sound Su,
the beginning sound of kotodama.

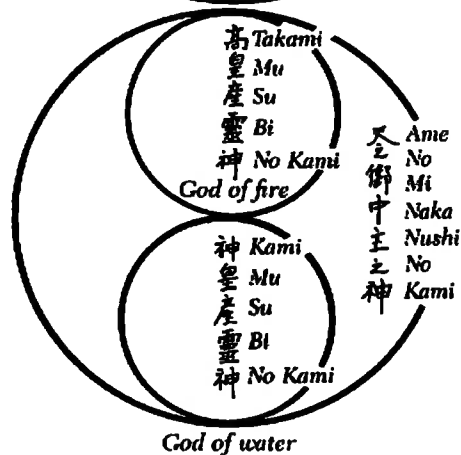
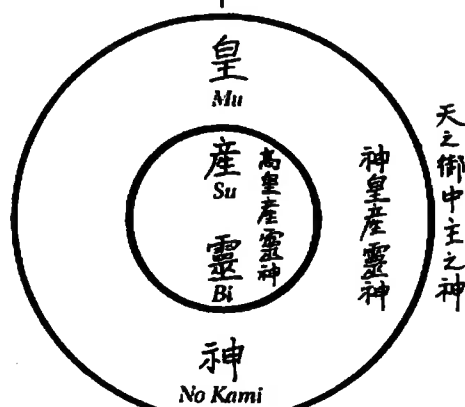
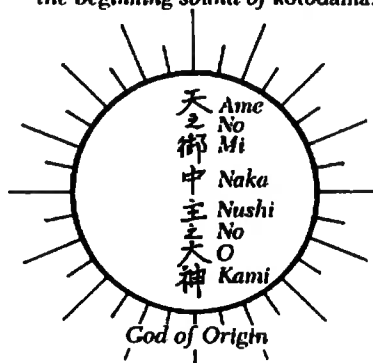


Figure 11: Symbols representing aikidō movement:

(left) Yin-yang and its underlying unity

(right) Kami, musubi and the kotodama sound SU

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